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MRS. CURGENVEN OF CURGENVEN.

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CHAPTER XXXVIII.

TRYING THE PISTOL.

THERESA had been speaking, whilst engaged in collecting the coral beads, kneeling on the carpet. When she saw the girl fling herself down, she went to her, on her knees, and seated herself beside her. The corals she had collected were in one palm. She laid the other hand on the ruddy golden head that was rocking and tossing, and gently stroked it.

'Esther, my dear, you must be reasonable. You love the sun, but if you climbed into heaven to it, you would be burnt in its fire. You love the moon, but if you were to drag it down to your little hut, its rays would be quenched, it would turn black as a cinder in your hands. You know that you never, never, never can be Justinian's wife.'

The girl, speaking into the pile of the carpet through her fingers, said, 'I know that. Didn't I join their hands in the Tolmaen?'

'I do not understand you, Esther.'

'Didn't I take him and make him hold Miss Alice's hand through the holed stone, and that's a surer marriage than any parson can bind. I did it—I—and what I did I cannot undo.'

'I do not understand about that,' said Theresa, raising her hand for a moment from the girl's head, that had ceased its rocking motion under the gentle pressure. 'I know nothing

about this holed stone, my dear, but of this I am very sure, that you and Justinian are too wide apart ever with honour, and without shame and misery, to be nearer each other than you are now. So try to be a sensible girl, and conquer this feeling in your heart that can only make you wretched, and which, if not driven away, may be the occasion of such disgrace to Justinian as will destroy his prospects in life.'

'She at the Cornish Chough said that.' Esther raised her head and turned it.

'And she, whoever she was, said what is true. Will you listen patiently to me, child ?'

'Yes, I'll try.'

Esther lifted herself on one arm, and turned to Theresa.

'Why did you take your hand off me? Are you angry?'

'No, indeed I am not.'

The evening light, shining through the window that commanded the Western sky, fell over the girl. The whole sky was in flame above the set sun, and in the flame were bars of cloud as pure gold gleaming with intense brilliancy. The amber glare from the sky pouring in at the window suffused the girl on the floor. In her tossing, her hair had become untied; it fell in a shining flood over her shoulder, and the arm that stayed her up.

Theresa put out her hand and drew the young head to her and laid it on her lap.

'There, my dear, will that please you? How hot your head is

'Go on,' said Esther, 'say what you will.'

'I have not much to say,' continued Theresa, 'but what I say I am sure, if you have—and I know you have it—an honest and true heart—I am sure you say to yourself in your own heart. You love Justinian, and he likes you after a fashion. So do I, I like you, I like you very much. So does Alice, so must all who come to know you.'

'You are wrong—folks hate me.'

'Surely not hate you.'

'They don't like me. No mothers 'll let their children come with me. No maids 'll ever play wi' me. I've no friends.'

'They do not understand you. You are a little wild for them. But that is not what I am speaking about. What I was about to say was this, Did you ever hear the story of the man who married a cat?'

'A cat! No.'

'He had a beautiful tabby, and she was a capital mouser. She was such a beautiful puss, with such white soft fur on her paws, and purred so sweetly, that the man asked Juno to turn her into a woman.'

• 'Who's Juno?'

'Well, we will say a wise woman.'

'Go on. Did she do it?'

'Yes.'

'I know,' said Esther musingly, 'that wise women theirselves turn o' night times when they likes into hares. There was one out Altarnun way. Her went about all over the country to night-times, after dimmets (twilight). But one night her got caught i' Squire Rodd's trap—set by the keeper. And next morning what did he find in his trap but a woman's hand. And he went round axing what she folks was ill. And when he came to Genefer Carn-due's cottage, her ou'd man—silly fool—let out as her were i' bed wi' a bad arm. Then the keeper he forced his way upstair, and found the ou'd woman i' bed, and he pu'd down the clothes, and sure enough, her had lost a hand.'

'You are interrupting my story.'

'Sure and sartain I was. There, go on, and put your hand over my lips to make me hou'd my tongue.'

'Well, Esther, so this wise woman, Juno, she did what she was asked. She turned the cat into a beautiful young wife. The man was very pleased, and he had the table spread for a great wedding feast, and he invited all his friends to it, to see what a lovely wife he had. Well, they came and made merry, and praised her very highly. All went on very well till a mouse ran through the room. Then up sprang the lady, and the tablecloth caught in her dress, and she jumped away and ran after the mouse, pulling the table-cloth and all the glasses and plates, and dishes and bottles, and pies and cakes, off the table in a smash and confusion on the floor. But she did not care; she had caught and was eating the mouse.'

'Oh, jimmery-chry!'. Esther burst out laughing; then slowly rose to her knees and stood up.

'Yes,' she said, 'I reckon it's a right sort o' a tale for me, and I knows it is so. There, gi'e me my corals, I'll string them again, and I promise you I'll put the thoughts of him out o' my heart so much as I can. I've been silly, I know. I wouldn't go after a mouse—no! But if I were at a great feast, with grand

silver and goold plates, and knives and forks, and glass and gran' folks, ladies and gentles, like as there in them picturs on the stairs, and talkin' about I don't know what, and if I was to hear a horniwink (plover) whistle outside o' the winder, I'd up—I know—just like that lady, and away I'd go out o' the winder and away after the horniwink, and to the moors and over Trewortha—and never come back there no more.'

'That is a brave and good girl. I thought you would do what is right, and I am not deceived.'

Esther turned sharply and looked with brightened face into Theresa's eyes and smiled, two deep dimples forming at the corners of her mouth. Then she caught up Theresa's hand and kissed it passionately.

'Now,' said she, 'show me the Bungalow, as they ca' it, wi' all them queer things inside as I've heard tell on, that the Captain made.'

'I will cheerfully show you what is there. But some of the contrivances no longer work, or I do not understand how to wind them up, and some have been removed.'

The girl fastened up her hair, and followed her guide down the great staircase. On the landing they passed a maid-servant, who looked with surprise and disgust at the half-savage girl, the granddaughter of the White Witch, and she stood well back against the wall, not so much out of deference to her mistress as to avoid the touch of the coarse clothes of Esther as she brushed by. In the hall was the footman, and he also stood aside and stared at the girl with insolence and disdain. What right had she from off the moors to be in the house? What could Mrs. Curgenven mean by letting her in, by taking her upstairs? There were queer tales about the mistress—that she'd been a sort of a governess, or goodness knew what. John Thomas could believe anything of her, now that she so far forgot herself as to associate with, and bring up the great staircase, such a creature as Esther Morideg. Birds of a feather fly together. You may know a person by the company he or she keeps. Lor! what be the world a coming to? John Thomas was expected to go up and down the backstairs, and if the backstairs was good enough for him, it was a great deal too good for wild creatures off the moor.

Esther was quite conscious of the impression she wrought on the two servants, and she breathed freer when she was outside the house. Theresa turned back to speak to the footman, and require

refreshments to be brought into the Bungalow, where she considered Esther would be more disposed to eat than in the house.

In the Bungalow, Theresa amused the girl with what pieces of mechanism could be got to act, and then brought her into the smoking-room, whither she had ordered a tray with rabbit-pie, tart, and some cider to be brought.

Here she seated herself, and allowed Esther to look at the weapons on the wall, the whips, spurs, fishing-rods, and spoils of the chase.

'Can you shoot?' asked the girl, turning to Theresa, who shook her head with a smile in response.

'But I can,' said Esther. 'My granfer he's brave wi' his gun, and I reckon I can bring down a woodcock as well as he. But thickey little things—they be pisterns (pistols) I s'pose. I never shot wi' such as they.'

She took down a pistol, cocked it, and let down the hammer cautiously. She then took the ramrod—it was an old-fashioned pistol, not a breechloader—and tried whether the instrument was loaded. Satisfied that it was not, she turned again to Theresa, and in a coaxing tone said, 'Now do 'y then let me have a shot wi' she and try what her be like.'

'So long as you do no mischief, I do not object.'

'Where be the bullets?' asked the girl. She had found the gunpowder case and had run a charge into the barrel.

Theresa opened a drawer, where were bullets, and wads, and caps; also in compartments the cartridges of various sizes for breechloaders.

The girl at once fitted a bullet and put on a cap. Then she threw open the window.

'Now, what shall I have a shot at?' she asked, looking out into the park. 'Hish! For sartain there be a hoodwall (wood-pecker) running up thickey oak tree. Do'y see'n? Yonder. I wonder if I can hit'n.'

The girl raised the pistol and fired.

The bird flew away.

'I missed'n,' said Esther. 'There, now, if it had been granfer's ou'd gun I'd not ha'done that. Or, by golly! if it had been Lawyer Physic standin' there, I dare take my oath I'd ha'shot'n.'

In the door, aghast, stood the footman with the tray.

Theresa made a sign to him to place the tray on the table by the window.

'Now, Esther, here is something better for you to do than to shoot hoodwalls.'

'I did'n shoot'n,' said the girl; 'for one, I pitied the poor bird; for the other, I did'n understand a little pistern.'

She was loading again.

'There,' said she, 'now you try. Have a shot and see if you can do better nor me.'

'No, thank you, Esther. I am quite sure I would fail more completely than yourself. Come now, sit and eat and drink.'

'When you're by yourself,' said the girl, 'try; in a time or two it will come. It would wi' me if I had thickey pistern to practise wi'. There, I'll put'n back i' her place. Mind now, her's loaden. You can amuse yourself wi' she when you like, and mebbe make a better shot nor I. Or,' she took down the pistol again, 'might I have a shot at the footman there?'

John Thomas fled out of the smoking-room, ran back to the house and to the servants' hall, as fast as his stockinged legs could carry him.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A NEW PROPOSAL.

No ladies called on the new Mrs. Gurgenvan. Gentlemen came to show courtesy to the squire, and clumsily apologised for their wives. One had a bad cold; another was visiting friends in town; the horses of several were indisposed; bereavement held others at home.

The rumour had circulated, whence and by whom started none could say, that the new Mrs. Gurgenvan was of doubtful character. It was asserted that she had been a ballet-dancer. How the ladies who made this assertion came to hold that opinion is not easily explained, as none of them knew anything whatever about Theresa. Moreover, such of their husbands as had, had protested that she was a perfect lady, of very charming manners and engaging appearance. Perhaps it was this fact that went against her. All the married ladies held as tenaciously as they did to the Athanasian Creed, that their husbands were easily deluded by pleasant features and a little flattery. Not one would allow that her husband had discernment and good taste except in that spasmodic moment when he made the choice of herself. The more the

gentlemen expatiated on the amiable manners, the handsome face, the graceful courtesy of Mrs. Curgenven, the more enrooted became the conviction in the bosoms of their ladies that she was a designing and unprincipled woman. That she was in bad form they concluded because she had succeeded and displaced Mrs. Curgenven the dowager. Jane was everything that society could desire : she was a woman of irreproachable morals, of the most formed manners in the most approved mould. She was a woman of sound sense and clear understanding. She was a woman of whom everything was known, from her birth till her bereavement. In every stage of life she had behaved well. She had been excellent as a hostess, admirable as a manageress of bazaars and charities ; she had never said a word that was lacking in good feeling, never done an act that was tactless. In her house, as wife, mother, mistress, she was unapproachable. The praises of Mrs. Jane Curgenven were sung on all sides over every breakfast and dinner table ; she was danced before the eyes of sleepy husbands in curtain lectures, she was held up in the schoolroom to young girls entering on life to be admired and striven after as a pattern, and everywhere and always the laudation of Mrs. Lambert carried with it the sometimes tacit, more often outspoken condemnation of Mrs. Percival. The very fact that there were two Mrs. Curgenvens of Curgenven forced them into comparison with one another ; and when one Mrs. Curgenven had the advantage of being a parson's daughter, of having been known for many years to all the aristocracy of the neighbourhood, and hugged to its bosom, whereas the other Mrs. Curgenven had dropped suddenly from the sky, or come up from the other place, and nothing was known either of her origin or of her acquaintances ; then, naturally enough, all the favour rolled into the scale of Jane, and none was available to weight that of Theresa.

The latter was fully aware how matters stood. She had waited in curiosity and hope for a week or two expecting visitors, but as no ladies came, the consciousness was forced upon her that society had pronounced against her.

Percival was impatient and angry. He could not bear in silence the slight cast on his wife. He stormed and grumbled ; he fretted and found fault. He rushed off to the rectory to demand an explanation from Jane, but Jane declined to give him any. He denounced her as having set the neighbours against his wife. She repudiated the charge with indignation

and with justice. She had not said a word against Theresa. When neighbours had asked questions relative to the new squiress, or turned the conversation to her in Jane's presence, she had maintained the strictest silence; she had refused to be drawn to express an opinion concerning Percival's wife.

What was to be done?

Percival vowed he would leave Curgenvén next winter and go to Italy, the Riviera, anywhere to be out of the ostracism that had fallen on his wife, and through her on him. He could not go to dinner parties to which she was not invited. He could not invite neighbours to his table, knowing that his invitations would be accepted by gentlemen only.

Yet it must be allowed that those gentlemen who did come to Curgenvén tried their best, by deference and kindly civility to Mrs. Curgenvén, to make up to her for the abstention of their wives; but they could not ask her to their houses, and all their efforts to persuade their womankind to call on Mrs. Curgenvén only deepened and intensified their mistrust of her.

The servants noticed that there were no lady callers, and commented on it. They began to entertain doubts as to the respectability of their mistress, to form romances concerning her early life, when she had been a stage-player, as they said. The villagers talked, they eyed the new squiress with suspicion, but waited to see whether she was liberally disposed before deciding finally as to her claim to be a lady.

Theresa offered the rector to take a class in the Sunday-school. He passed his fingers through his white whiskers, and with many polite and unctuous speeches declined her services. There really was not a class that was not provided with a teacher. It would positively be the imposition of too heavy a task upon her.

Theresa was not one who cared for society. She lived much wrapped up in herself, and was happy to have books to read, beautiful objects about her, and a husband whose whims and pleasures she might consult. But the isolation in which she was placed wounded her; it grieved her specially because it annoyed Percival, and debarred him from taking his proper place in county society.

Theresa was in the Bungalow smoking-room thinking of these things when Physic entered.

'Glad to find you here, madam—and alone,' said he.

'Mr. Curgenvén is out. I presume it is he whom you wish to see.'

'I am come on business.'

'As I said, he is not at home.'

'Precisely, but my business is with yourself.'

'Indeed!'

'You were so good as to furnish me with promptitude the sum I had demanded. For that I am obliged. Circumstances have occurred, over which I have no control, that place me in extreme pecuniary difficulties, and oblige me immediately to find a sum of money that I am unable unassisted to raise.'

'I quite understand to what this leads,' said Theresa haughtily. 'Because you have been able to wring from me three hundred pounds, you are resolved to wring some more.'

'It is a case of necessity.'

'It is a case of the horse-leech,' retorted Theresa. 'You will not let go till you have taken all you can.'

'When a man is driven to his wits' ends for money—'

'He loses all scruple, that is, supposing he had any scruples to lose.'

'You put things in a very harsh light.'

'The case stands thus,' said Theresa, her angry blood swelling her veins. 'You have determined to get from me all you can at the risk of causing misery to me by estranging my husband from me. Do your worst. You shall have no more.'

'I do not understand you.'

'I spoke plainly enough. I will not be tortured thus. It was to me inexpressibly painful to extort from Mr. Curgenven the sum you required. I did it, but I will not do it again.'

'Very well,' said Physic. 'Then you know the consequences. I shall produce the will.'

'As you like. But I do not believe you will do it. What have you to gain? Now you are agent for this estate, not without some advantage to yourself. Do you suppose you will retain the agency when it passes to Mrs. Jane Curgenven? If what I hear be true, she was constantly urging Captain Curgenven to take it from you and give it to the Smiths, who are said to be worthy and upright men. When the estate is hers, will she retain you as her factotum? I doubt it. So do you. If you prove that will, you lose what is worth something not inconsiderable. For that reason you will not do it.'

Physic looked at Theresa with a blank expression, but speedily recovered himself,

'What is this agency worth that I should care for it? If I tell Mrs. Jane that I can give her the estate and house, I can make it a proviso that I am kept in my place, and that I receive some consideration for my services in helping her into her own.'

'No, you will not. She will not thank you to be proclaimed no wife of Captain Curgenven, and her child to be illegitimate. She will owe you a grudge and not a debt.'

'We shall see.'

'Yes, we shall see. If this is all you have to say to me, you may go.'

'And you will drive me to use the will?'

'You will not use it. You are too well aware of your own interest to do so. I tell you that I had rather be in poverty again than endure the torture to which you subject me, and the risk of forfeiting my husband's love.'

'Come, come, do not be so hot!' said Physic, assuming a conciliatory tone. 'You know that we are old friends.'

'Indeed! I know nothing of the kind.'

'Some consideration is due to me as an old admirer.'

Theresa pointed to the door. 'Leave me. Do your worst.'

'I will not go. I will not leave you in anger against me. Upon my soul, I do not desire to cause you annoyance. I would give you back the will most readily if I could afford it. I do not wish to drive you out of Curgenven. I do not wish to see Mrs. Jane come in, with her nose in the air. I ask but a reasonable thing. Here you are in possession of a fine estate worth four thousand a year, and, as you know very well, you hold it only because I do not produce a certain document. That document you put into my hand and you read what was written on it. I was empowered to use it or suppress it, as I saw fit.'

'I do not suppose that this had any legal authority, and that you are really justified in retaining it.'

'I am the best judge of that. Suffice it, between you and me, that you are mistress of Curgenven because I use the right given me by the writer of that paper. It stands to common sense that I should be considered for what I have done. I have done you a vast favour—worth four thousand a year—and now that I am in dire need for money I may with fairness ask you to let me have a little help.'

'A little help! You have had three hundred pounds.'

'What is three hundred to four thousand a year for, say, ten

years? Four thousand for ten years is forty thousand pounds, and you offer me three hundred! I spit at the offer. You would give me a dog's pay for my services. I will be treated like a man.'

'Then do your worst, Mr. Physic. We shall know what to expect.'

'Beggary, utter beggary.'

'Not beggary—poverty, perhaps.'

'Poverty most assuredly. And then—how will Mr. Percival find himself in poverty? You know that there is no work in him, no stability. He never earned an honest penny in his life. He can sponge—that is all he can do.'

'If we come to poverty we shall have to shape ourselves to our new quarters. That will be our concern. Tell me, once for all, what your demand is, so that this will may be delivered into my hands—into my hands, which in an inconsiderate moment, in this room, confided it to you.'

'A thousand pounds.'

'That is to say, seven hundred in addition to the three hundred you have received.'

'Oh dear no! It is dirt cheap at thirteen hundred.'

'A thousand stars out of the sky you might as well demand. I neither will ask my husband for the sum, nor, did I ask it, would he give it, not knowing the purpose for which it was given.'

'Let us understand each other,' said Physic coolly. 'You do not want to be further annoyed by me. Very good. A thousand pounds will place you in such a position that my power to annoy you is gone. I do not desire to turn you and your husband out of Curgenven, but I am not disposed to surrender my hold over you for any sum less than a thousand pounds. I should be a fool if I did.'

'I tell you for once and all, a thousand pounds is impossible. Do you suppose that my husband would sign me a cheque for that sum without knowing what I would do with it? I had trouble enough getting him to give me a cheque for three hundred.'

'I am well aware of that. But I know also that he has a Bolivian bond for a thousand. Three hundred and that would serve my purpose; it is about the only security he has.'

'What! you would have me rob him?'

'No robbery at all. It is securing Curgenvens and four thousand per annum to him. A very small sacrifice indeed. If you deny me what I want, then indeed you rob him of a fine property, a good income, and an enviable position. If he loses all this, you do it, you despoil him of everything rather than relieve my immediate necessity by handing over to me this trumpery bond.'

'He keeps all his papers locked.'

'But you know where is the key.'

'I will not do it. Nothing in the world will induce me to it. I cannot—will not—rob my dear husband.'

'Then I offer you another alternative.'

'What is that?' Theresa buried her face in her hands.

'There are family jewels, heirlooms, of very considerable value; in fact, worth more than a thousand pounds. These, I presume, are in your keeping. Let me have them. I do not propose to get rid of them, but to raise on them the sum I require; and I leave it to you to get them back by the gradual extinction of the sum raised upon them.'

'Now you propose that I should rob the family.'

'What family? The dead Curgenvens in the ancestral vault, in the family silo? or the Curgenvens that are yet to come? Who will know if these jewels are in other hands for a while? Do you see so much company? go out to so many grand balls, where you would be expected to wear the jewels? Trust me, they may sleep in their cases so long as you are Mrs. Curgenvan of Curgenvan. The county folk don't like you, they will have nothing to say to the adventuress—the soubrette of the San Francisco Theatre. No—the drive may be grass-grown for all it is needed for the carriages of the squirearchy of the neighbourhood. You may dismiss the gatekeepers at the lodge, they will not be called on to open to any. The neighbourhood has placed you under an interdict, and as you are under an interdict you will not be required to wear jewelry. If the jewels be away from Curgenvan, no one will be the wiser save yourself and me. What does Mr. Curgenvan care about these gewgaws? In ten years, by a payment of a hundred and fifty per annum, I dare say you may be able to get them all back into your hands again. Meantime Curgenvan is assured to your husband and to you. I leave you a week to turn this proposal over in your mind. Let me see—this day week—where shall we meet? not anywhere near the house. Say at Tolmenna—on the moor, where we can make sure

none will be looking and listening. If you bring the jewels, I will bring the will, and we shall effect an exchange. Till this day week—and then—at Tolmenna.'

CHAPTER XL.

OLD AND NEW QUARTERS.

'GET on your hat, Alice. I am going to carry you off.'

'Where to, Justinian?'

'It is too bad; you have not been to the house for an age. I run in here like a tame cat, and you never come to us. By the way, Aunt Jane, you have not been there either.'

'No, Justinian. You must remember my feelings. It would be most painful for me to go there, where I have spent such happy years.'

'But, Aunt Jane, you do not know my stepmother.'

'Oh—I do,' in a chilling tone.

'Alice does not. It is too bad that here she should be so close to the house, and not have been in to make her acquaintance. The stepmother is not a bad sort of person at all—she's rather jolly, in fact, and I don't blame the governor. So now, Alice, come and be introduced, and make your courtesy.'

'Oh—I—I think Alice has a music-lesson,' said Mrs. Jane.

'No, mamma. Wednesday is my day.'

'But practice, dear. You cannot expect to get on, and it is not fair to your master, who comes out from Liskeard, nor to me, who have to pay half-a-guinea for your lesson, if you do not work for it in preparation.'

'But, mamma, I can prepare at another time.'

Mrs. Curgenven frowned, and slightly shook her head, as a private notice to her daughter not to combat her reasons.

'Besides,' said that lady, 'there are some gathers out in her dress.'

'Oh, that is nothing, aunt. Alice can change her frock.'

'It is not that only; there are various reasons.'

'But what are they?' persisted Justinian. 'It seems to me that Alice is in duty bound to pay her respects to my stepmother. It seems so queer that she should not come to our house and get acquainted with her. I am quite sure Alice will like her, she is such a lady—so true a lady.'

' You are an excellent judge, no doubt,' said Mrs. Curgenvén, throwing up her head.

' I think I am,' retorted Justinian frankly. ' You say you know her. Don't you think so yourself?'

' Really, my dear fellow, that is not a fair question. Naturally I cannot say other than that your father has made his choice, and no doubt on excellent reasons.'

' That is not an answer at all. I tell you freely that I did not readily swallow the tidings that I had a stepmother. I was very angry; but when I saw her, and had a talk with her, I found that I had been mistaken; and it is the place of a gentleman to acknowledge when he has been in error, and only a fool persists in his prejudice after he has been shown that he was mistaken. So—there—I have had no proper reasons. Alice, get on your hat.'

' No,' said Mrs. Curgenvén, ' Alice was not well this morning. I detected a slight cobweb in her throat, and the weather is damp. I do not wish her to go out. Indeed, I am going to administer bryonia.'

' Mamma, I am quite well!' said the astonished girl.

' My dear, you try to persuade yourself that you are. Stay here—or, no—come up with me to my room. You must have a sip of bryonia every two hours out of my china spoon. Justinian, when bryonia is administered there must be no exposure to damp. Follow me, Alice, at once. Justinian, remain where you are till my return.'

As soon as the mother and daughter were in the hall, Alice remonstrated against being made to take medicine.

' Mamma, I really am perfectly well.'

' My dear, I ought to judge that better than you. You take bryonia to prevent your going to the manor house. Now go to my room and wait there for me. You can get out the china spoon if you like, it is in the medicine chest.'

Then Mrs. Curgenvén entered the study, shut the door behind her, and said to her father, who was then engaged on the 'Contemporary' and a sermon in little dips and alternations: 'Papa, here is a pretty kettle of fish. Justinian wishes to carry off Alice to bow down to and worship that woman, and he has taken me to task for not visiting her. What is to be done?'

' Jane, of course we must be ordinarily civil.'

' I cannot dissemble. If she were in a Penitentiary I would

cheerfully visit her daily, and I would go without Devonshire cream for a twelvemonth, even in the black currant tart, if by my self-denial I could save her soul ; but I cannot, and will not, countenance her at Curgenvan.'

'But, Jane, you must remember that she is the wife of our squire, who is your poor husband's cousin. There will be a great deal of talk, and very unpleasant talk, if you hold yourself aloof. What can people say to explain your conduct but what is most distressing to think could be said of a member of the Curgenvan family.'

'I don't care three straws what people say. I will not regard her as a relation.'

'Then why did you ask my opinion ? You have made up your mind.'

'I ask, because here is Justinian at me for not going to the manor house, and refusing to take any excuse for Alice. I am obliged to dose her with bryonia.'

'Why, what is the matter with her ?'

'Nothing ; but I must make an excuse for her not going to the house to-day. He will be plaguing me again to-morrow. I can't keep Alice perpetually on bryonia.'

'No, I do not see myself how you can help letting Alice go to the house, and going yourself.'

'Good gracious ! My dear father ! To *that* woman !'

'Why not ? You know absolutely nothing against her. Her manners leave nothing to be desired. She is highly educated. Except that she was a governess, and has no relations, she is unexceptionable.'

'Goodness me ! Really, papa—and rector with the care of souls, and hoping to be a bishop ! I do not understand this moral obtuseness. But there, men are differently constituted from women. I believe this, even clergymen rather prefer a spice of wickedness in good-looking women.'

'My dear Jane, you forget the respect due to me—to my age, my avocation, my relation to yourself.'

'I beg your pardon, papa ; I was a little hot. I could not help it. What am I to do ?'

'There, you ask my advice again, without the slightest intention of following it; nevertheless, I will give it. It will not do for you to hold aloof from the squires. You will tear the parish into two factions, one siding with her, one with you.'

Percival will be extremely angry, and will refuse his subscriptions to the charities and bring the organisation to a standstill. I shall have to dismiss either the Scripture-reader or the mission-woman. If I get rid of the former all the Evangelicals will be up in arms, and denounce me as gravitating to sacerdotalism; if I dismiss the mission-woman, I shall have all the High Church folk shaking the dust off their feet against me as wholly sunk in the slough of Puritanism. If I am not *via media*, I am nothing. But that is not all. Consider the very unpleasant situation we shall be in with the neighbours. The estrangement will be commented on, and there is simply no estimating the extravagance of the myths that will be formed relative to Percival's wife. You must also bear in mind that Lady Carminow is a woman free from prejudices and of a very decided character. How do you know but that Lady Carminow may take it into her head to visit and make much of Percival's wife? It is precisely the thing she is likely to do. And if she does this, do you not know that at once the whole neighbourhood, from Lady Tregonick down to every curate's wife, will veer round and vie with each other in courting her? Then where will you be?

'Yes,' said Jane bitterly, 'Lady Carminow is capable of even that. I never can forgive her laying the foundation-stone of the Ranters' chapel at Cartuthers.'

'This must be weighed. Take my advice, Jane, and be decently civil to Mrs. Percival. Then you can always draw back at any time, or push forward, according to circumstances.'

'That I never will do. Never! I have too much self-respect to push forward with *her*.'

'Very well. Maintain a cold and ceremonious demeanour.'

'A cold and ceremonious demeanour I will, if I can. I cannot call black white; and if society should take up that person, so much the worse for society. I shall be clear of participation. So far—society has taken much the same view of her that I have.'

'Perhaps you managed that.'

'I have not spoken of her.'

'Exactly; and your chilling reception of any word spoken about her has made society suppose that there is more behind the scenes than there really is. You are uncharitable.'

'We shall never agree on this head,' said Jane, 'and therefore had better cease to speak about it. Something, however, must be settled, that I may not be worried by the importunities of

Justinian. He has been won over now, and quite admires this precious stepmother.'

'What I desire, Jane, is, that there be no open quarrel. Maintain a semblance of good terms, for the sake of the parish, of the charities, the organisation—for my sake. If it be said that there is a quarrel between me and my squire—who is also in a fashion a connection—it may stand in the way of my advancement.'

'Very well, papa,' said Jane, after some ruminations, 'I will call, and by my manner, I trust, I shall be able to let that person understand, unless she wears rhinoceros hide, that exteriorly we are on speaking terms, but that acquaintanceship stops there. As to Alice, never will I allow her into the manor house whilst that woman is there. I trust I value my child's immortal soul too highly to submit it to so great peril.'

'Peril—fiddle faddle!'

'You cannot touch pitch and not be defiled. You cannot associate with that sort of creature without a lowering of moral tone. I have told you, papa, the limits of my submission to your wishes. Now I will go, give Alice her bryonia, and then put on my bonnet, and walk with Justinian and make this call. I'll get it over at once.'

'Very well, my dear; now leave me to my sermon.'

When Jane Curgenven had made up her mind to do a thing that was disagreeable, she did it at once. Accordingly, after having administered the bryonia as a matter of conscience—not that Alice required it, but because she had said she would administer it—then Jane Curgenven started with Justinian to call at the manor.

She was by no means sure that the squires would receive her, for she was aware that her behaviour to Theresa on the Sunday had been discourteous if not insolent. Jane had satisfied her own conscience as to her conduct. 'I am not a hypocrite. What I feel I express. If that person resents my treatment of her—it makes no difference to me—I have done what I undertook. If she receives me and is civil, it will be very clear that she has a guilty conscience, knows that I was in the right, and cringes to me to obtain my silence.'

But Jane did not find Theresa at home. The footman informed her that Mr. and Mrs. Curgenven had just left the house in the dog-cart for Liskeard. This was a relief to her mind. She left her card and departed.

Percival had driven his wife into Liskeard to have a look at

the Pill-box, and decide what was to be done with its furniture. The lease would soon be up, and he was undecided whether to have the contents sold, or whether to remove them to Curgenven, or, again, whether he would sell part and retain a moiety of the articles. A groom sat behind in the dog-cart, so that Theresa and her husband could not converse with freedom during the drive. Moreover, on reaching the Pill-box, Bathsheba, who had returned to it, not having proved a success as housekeeper over a large establishment, had much to say, grievances to complain of, and inquiries to make relative to her favourite, Master Justinian.

After a while Percival was able to send the old woman about some commission in the town, and then he threw himself into his old smoking arm-chair, drew Theresa to him, put his arm about her, and looked round.

'I say, T——, I had no conception it was so dirty and small. Do look at the smoked ceiling—see how shabby the paper is. Fancy enduring for so long a mangy red-flock paper! It is stuffy—one can hardly breathe here.'

'Poor old house. You were happy here—you must love it.'

'I don't see that. I was happy in spite of it. Why, T——, think of the study at home, and then look at this.' Curgenven was home to him now.

'Upon my word, T——, it is a wonder to me how men can consent to live in such tight quarters. It is not wholesome. There should be a law against it. The State takes care that in school-rooms there be sufficient cubic feet of air. It should forbid the construction of a house in which there is not breathing space.'

'You have been in worse places than the Pill-box.'

'I know I have. I look back with horror on existence as it was then, just as does a butterfly, I suppose, on its chrysalis or caterpillar state.'

'But, Percival, suppose, like Sly, you were to wake up and find it all a dream, and you were back in the Pill-box, after a brief period of lordship?'

'Like Sly, I'd say: "Come, madam wife, sit by my side, and let the world slip; we shall ne'er be younger."'

'What, Percival, you would be content?'

'Not I—my only consolation would be that I should take you with me, heart's delight.'

Theresa put her arm about his neck.

'You would reconcile yourself to it?' she said.

'Never. Indeed, I am not sure but that, having you here, and not being able to give you the comforts and pleasures you deserve, I would feel it as an aggravation of the ill.'

'And yet there is something to be said on the other side. It is no secret that the society of Philistia does not choose to accept me, and that this is an awkwardness and irritation to you. It places you in difficulties.'

'My own T——, what care I for the society of Philistia? They showed me the cold shoulder when I lived in the Pill-box. Now good folk would like to be civil, but you puzzle them, because they cannot find you in Burke or Walford. Moreover, Jane has been telling tales, or hinting evil, after the fashion of the professionally pious. The Philistines are slow and timorous in the extreme, each afraid of the other. Do not concern yourself about them. I did not when in this house. I saw their carriages, their broughams and victorias, and landaus pass, and never did one stop at this door. I got along without them, and I shall get along without them very comfortably till it pleases them to come round in their sluggish way. When they do, I accept it, not for my sake, but for yours. But as for the society of Philistia—I care for it not a snap. Bless you, T——, dearest, we who have knocked about the world, and have brains of quicksilver, cannot find much pleasure in association with brains of white lead and linseed oil kneaded into a putty.'

'But, Percival, suppose that there had been some mistake about the property, and that a will were found.'

'Oh, you have had that nonsense propounded before you. Physic told me something of the sort. I do not believe for a moment that such a will exists. If it exists, why has it not been produced? The only person who would be interested in concealing or destroying such a will would be myself, and, by George! I'm not the man to do such a thing as that.'

'And if you found the will you would give it up?'

'I would—and then shoot myself.'

'And I——'

'My dearest T——, I know as well as you that I should be merely an incumbrance to you. I cannot earn my livelihood. I tried as a surgeon and, after killing one or two of my patients, took to art, and never sold a picture. I had not learned perspective nor how to mix my colours. I went sheep-farming in the Rockies, and lost my sheep. I was taken in—bought a farm where there

could be no provision for the sheep in the winter. They starved—I was ruined. I tried a clerkship, but I never in my life could do compound addition. I was kicked out. By Moses! T——, I have tried being everything but being a waiter, and have made a botch of everything. The long and the short of it is, I'm an ass. Dear old Lambert took me up and cared for me. But I am incapable now as I was before of earning enough to find me in bread and butter. I have the best will, but I can't do it. I know what the end would be: you would take in needlework and wear these dear fingers to the bone to maintain me. Rather than that, I'd blow my brains out. I'd do the honest and right thing, if that will turned up, and then I'd make my *congé* to a world in which I don't know how to live except as a gentleman who has inherited a fortune which he is incapable of acquiring for himself. But there, away with these thoughts. Thank heaven!—I do it heartily—there is and can be no such a will. Physic has tried to scare me, and some one—Jane, I suppose—has been playing on your fears. I snap my fingers under the nose of the bogie. There is no such will.'

CHAPTER XLI.

AGAIN: INVENI PORTUM.

MR. CURGENVEN and Justinian went for a couple of nights to the house of Sir Sampson Tregontick for a shooting party. Justinian was a keen sportsman and a good shot; Percival was a sportsman by fits and starts, and not a successful one when he had the fit on him.

Theresa was not sorry that they were away; she had to form a decision as to her course with Physic, and then take it. She desired to be alone to consider what she should do. There was no one whom she could consult. She had no friend save her husband, and she was precluded from laying the matter before him. Bitterly, but with a sense of its ineffectuality, did she reproach herself for having placed in the agent's hand the weapon with which he now threatened her. If she had withheld the document, looked at it before it left her possession, this condition of affairs would not have existed.

She locked herself into her boudoir and opened the jewel-case. She drew from it the same jewels she had exhibited to Esther,

and sat looking at them and musing. They—the finest of them, at all events—were heirlooms. Jane Curgenven had had them in her possession, but had conscientiously relinquished them. Theresa knew how much it must have cost Jane to resign these to herself; but Jane had done it, actuated by her strict sense of justice, with scrupulous rectitude, not retaining a single ring or brooch which she could not say had been a present to herself. And now Theresa was asked to alienate from the family these ornaments that had decorated the Curgenven ladies for several generations. Could she do it? She weighed the reasons urging to compliance with Physic's demand. They were cogent. If this will could be got from him and destroyed, then the Curgenven family would be delivered from the scandal of the revelation of the relations in which Captain Lambert had stood to Jane Pamphlet. This was the more important, as Theresa saw there was a growing inclination towards each other between the young people. A marriage between Justinian and Alice would heal everything, if only the secret of the invalidity of the marriage of Alice's mother could be kept from the world. The cousins were much together now, and their affection for each other was ripening. Were Percival with herself and Justinian banished from Curgenven, then in all probability this nascent passion would be nipped in the bud. Percival would leave England and take his son with him. Jane Curgenven would do all that lay in her power to stop the intimacy.

For this reason it seemed worth while, at the cost of the jewelry, to secure the will. But, on the other hand, Theresa shrank from the consequences to herself. The day might come when the heirlooms would be required of her; the jewels might be looked for after her death, and she would be accused of having misappropriated them. If they were asked for in her lifetime, she would not be able to give her reasons for having disposed of them, and it might reawaken suspicion in her husband, and turn away his heart from her. In future generations she would be spoken of as the dishonest woman who had fraudulently got rid of this treasure of the family. She could conceive in what terms Jane would refer to her, when Alice was squiress of Curgenven, and the family jewelry was not forthcoming wherewith to array her. Jane trampled on her in life, and would trample on her when dead. The loss of the necklaces, and rings, and brooches would be used as corroborative proof against her character. Yet she, Theresa, was called on to make the sacrifice, not only to preserve her own

fortune, but also Jane's good name. To save Jane's good name she must steep her own in ignominy!

Theresa put up the jewels, unlocked her door, and went out to walk in the garden. Her responsibility overwhelmed her, and her blood was in a fever, her brain in a whirl. At one moment she thought she would let Physic do his worst. At the next she shrank from the prospect of being cast on the world again, and was prepared to make any sacrifice to escape that. At one moment it seemed to her right to allow Captain Lambert's last wishes to take effect, at whatever cost to the family; and then she doubted whether it was his last wish to brand his child with bastardy. Surely, she said, he drew up that will on the supposition that I, on reappearing, would assert my right to be his wife or widow, claim the name, and put in some plea for sustentation from the property. I have not done any of this. I have been willing to let my rights be covered over; and to save his memory, to spare the feelings of his wife, to prevent a slur falling on his child, I have consented to let the past be as a thing that had not been. Under these circumstances the aspect of the case is altered. Had he thought I would do this, he would never have made that will. I am fulfilling his best wishes in doing what I can at whatever cost to recover and destroy it.

She longed, she craved for advice, for someone to whom to confide her difficulties, and who, with clear sight into the ways of right and wrong, might lead her to do what was not only expedient for all concerned, but what was the course morally justifiable.

As if in answer to this cry out of her heart, the rector appeared before her.

'Oh, Mr. Pamphlet!' She ran to him with a flutter at her heart, a crimson spot in each cheek, and with both hands extended. 'Oh! Mr. Pamphlet, do help me! I want advice in great difficulty. Do come with me into the walled garden, and let me tell you all.'

'Most assuredly,' answered the rector, blandly. 'Providence and the bishop have placed me here as pastor of souls, to guide the doubtful, strengthen the weak, raise the fallen, and clear the clouds from before all darkened eyes, to the best of my poor ability.'

'That is exactly what I want—what I want above everything in the world,' gasped Theresa. 'Oh, how kind, how good of you!'

'Not at all; it is my duty, by virtue of my office and commission.'

She threw open the garden gate, and both entered. There

was a long wall against which old figs grew, and she turned to that. No gardeners were about. In the fig walk they could be alone, unobserved and not overheard. They paced together the whole length of the walk before she spoke ; they turned at the end, by the tool-house, and then he said encouragingly, ‘Now—what is it ?’

‘Mr. Pamphlet, my poor husband, in his will——’

‘Good gracious ! He has gone out rabbit-shooting—there has not occurred an accident ?’

‘No. I mean Captain Lambert.’

‘Oh !’

‘He made a will by which he provided for your daughter under her maiden name, and for his child by her.’

‘Oh !’ Mr. Pamphlet’s face grew long and blank.

‘This is in existence, but has not been produced. We are threatened with its production.’

‘Merciful powers ! If this get about—and anyone could go to Somerset House and see the will for a shilling—then my chances of elevation to a bish—I mean my ministerial efficacy in the parish would be crippled !’

‘The will leaves everything to your daughter and grandchild.’

‘Yes—but—I would rather sacrifice everything than have this come out.’

‘Then what do you think should be done ?’

‘I—I think—I——’

‘There has been an offer made to compromise the matter. That is to say, the will will be delivered into my hands on condition that I surrender the family jewels.’

‘What, to suppress—tear up the will ! But that is a felony. Why did you mention this to me ?’

The rector’s face became pink, showing doubly so by contrast with his white whiskers.

‘Am I justified in accepting this offer ?’

‘Oh, don’t ask me. For heaven’s sake, consult anyone—Percival, Physic—anyone but me. I don’t want to be mixed up in this matter at all.’

‘I cannot speak of it to my husband, for you know his direct manner : he would say “Prove the will !” without considering results, how they affected himself or anyone else. I cannot consult Mr. Physic for other reasons. I have no one to confer with but yourself in this matter—in this difficulty.’

'Oh! good gracious! I want to hear no more about it. It might do me serious harm. I had better know nothing; then, should there be trouble, I could safely protest my ignorance.'

'But, Mr. Pamphlet! it affects your interests, as you yourself admitted.'

'Ye—s.' He dropped the umbrella he was carrying from his shaking hand, and when he stooped to pick it up, his hat fell on the path from his shaking head.

'I have to decide, and decide at once, whether to sacrifice the jewels or not.'

'But the jewels are an heirloom, are most valuable. You have really no right—oh, why did you consult me about this? I am involved in a matter out of which I wish to keep clear.'

'It is for your own sake and your daughter's that I consult you.'

'I see—I see—but, goodness! I do not know what to say.'

'Would you advise me to allow of the production of the will?'

'That would be fatal to my interests. It would blast my family with eternal disgrace.'

'Then shall I surrender the jewels?'

'That would be robbery of the family. You have no right to dispose of them.'

'Then what am I to do?'

'Is there no other way—can you not frighten—threaten the person, whoever he be, that has this will?'

'How threaten—frighten?'

'He is committing felony in retaining it.'

'That would but force him to produce it.'

'I see. My head is turning. Can't you say you have no right to dispose of the jewels?'

'He knows that as well as I.'

'Then—I really do not know what to say. I had best advise nothing, and I must adapt myself to whatever happens as best I can.'

'Then, Mr. Pamphlet, I want guidance in my doubt, and you cannot give it me?'

'I don't want to compromise myself.'

'And you cannot advise?'

'No—I'd rather not. I don't know what to advise.'

'Nor clear the clouds from my darkened eyes?'

'Indeed, no—oh dear, no!' After a long pause and deep meditation, and much combing of his white whiskers with the dis-

engaged fingers, Mr. Pamphlet said, ‘And yet I can give you my advice. I was wrong in saying I could not—my matured and weighty advice in this matter—’

‘And that is—?’

‘To form your own opinion on it, and, having formed, to follow it.’

They left the garden, and Theresa walked with the rector through the churchyard to the garden gate of the parsonage. He avoided all further reference to the subject of consultation, and spoke of the weather, the rabbit shooting, the schools, and parochial matters. The night had begun to close in. It was not dark, but gloomy, a dull leaden shadow hung over the landscape, and the distance was obscure. Theresa turned at the gate, after having with a heavy heart bidden the rector farewell.

‘Shall I go back with you to the house?’ he asked hesitatingly; ‘night is falling rapidly.’

‘No, thank you, I know my way, the white space of the path is visible enough.’

‘And you are not afraid to go through the churchyard alone?’

‘Why should I? I have not annoyed the dead.’

‘There are two or three paths, mind not to take that to the left; it leads to the place where the heating apparatus is, and there are steps to it.’

‘You need not fear.’

Then Theresa set off at a quick pace to cross the graveyard. The church rose as a huge black patch against the sky before her.

The rector also turned to walk home, but changed his mind, and said to himself, ‘I will wait till she is through.’

Theresa did not know this. She stepped on, more troubled in mind than before. She had sought light, and been given none. The day was appointed on which she was to meet Physic at Tolmena, and by then the decision must be made one way or other.

As she came near the flat tombstone on which she had reposed on Sunday, she was startled to see in the darkness a figure as of a man seated where she had been, and he seemed to be doing what she had done, tracing the letters on the stone with his finger. Her heart stood still, her feet were arrested. Then, as he traced, she saw each letter shine phosphorescent in the dark:—

Inveni portum, spes et Fortuna valete.

She uttered an exclamation of terror.

He turned his face, a lambent light played over it, and she knew her first husband.

With a cry she sank to the ground and lost consciousness.

CHAPTER XLII.

A THIRD ALTERNATIVE.

THERESA did not return to full consciousness at once. There came to her glimpses of light and bursts of sound, episodes of wakefulness to movement, and to a sight of drawn curtains and a sound of whispers, and then tracts of insensibility.

When she did awake to full possession of her faculties, she found herself in bed in her own room, and she heard the voices of her husband and of the doctor. Both had been summoned.

The first sentence she heard and understood was spoken by the medical attendant. He said : 'She must be kept perfectly quiet, and not be bothered about the jam. Her heart is affected.'

Theresa raised herself on her elbow, and said : 'Yes, I knew that—since my last illness.'

'It was the jam—and very provoking,' exclaimed the surgeon. But Percival ran to the bedside and took her hand between his and said : 'You are better, T——; nearly right again ! That is capital !'

'What has happened ?' she asked.

'My dearest T——, you have given us such a fright !'

'And I——' she mused. 'Yes, I have had a fright, too.'

'It was the rats,' threw in the surgeon. 'Twas vexing, I allow, and sixteen pots of jam. All the brandy cherries, also.'

'You have had a succession of fainting fits. You fell back into one as soon as brought round. We were afraid you would slip away altogether, between our fingers, in one of them. Then, T——, what should I have done ?'

She looked affectionately into his face, and he stooped and kissed her.

'I had a fright ; I suppose that was it,' said Theresa meditatively. 'Yes, I was coming through the churchyard——' Then she interrupted herself, turned to the doctor, and asked, 'May I get up ?'

'Not to-night. Perhaps to-morrow. But, mind this ; don't

you go exciting yourself over pots of jam and brandy cherries any more.'

'Pots of jam?'

'Ah, yes! I know all about it. I made inquiries, and found that the rats had been at the store closet, and had eaten the parchment off sixteen pots, so that the fruit was mildewed, and had in the same way uncovered the brandy cherries, put their tails in, sucked them, and absorbed all the juice. It was very vexing, but you must not fret over these matters. You will have to buy, that is all. Don't worry yourself any more. Leave all that to the housekeeper, and keep your heart emotionless. It must be saved all kind of agitation.'

'I had forgotten about the jams.'

'Oh, no, that was it! The housekeeper told me how it disturbed you. You've been brooding over it—that is what has done it. Now, dear lady, be brave, be heroic; banish the jams and the brandy cherries from your thoughts, and set yourself to get well. That is my best advice. The heart is a delicate and capricious instrument, like a chronometer. It must not be treated jerkily, but gingerly. You understand?'

When the doctor was gone, Theresa made Percival take a chair by her bedside, and said: 'Now, tell me all about it.'

'The old boy found you.'

'Who is he?'

'I mean Mr. Pamphlet. He came to the house to say that he had found you in the churchyard in a fainting fit.'

'I dare say. I had been talking to him in the walled garden, and I accompanied him through the yard to his wicket-gate. Then I turned.' She pressed Percival's hand with a nervous spasm, and said: 'I saw Lambert there—I mean in the graveyard.'

'Fudge!'

'I did. He was sitting on a flat stone, and was writing on it in Latin.'

'Now, T——, that is clearly impossible. Dear old Lambert had no more knowledge of Latin than

Amo, amas,
I loved a lass!

and, unfortunately for him, he loved two, and was not off with the old before he was on with the new. That's the length of his Latin. You won't make me believe he's been to a grammar

school in kingdom come, and has become so ready with his classics that he can scribble in the Latin tongue.'

'I do not quite mean that, Percy. I had seen this tombstone on Sunday. The lines on it are—

Inveni portum, spes et Fortuna valete;
Nil milii vobiscum: ludite nunc alios.

'They are beyond me.'

'I am no scholar, but I think I know the sense. It is this: I have found harbour. Hope and Good Fortune, farewell. I have nothing more to do with you. Go now, make sport of others.'

'I don't like the sentiment at all,' said Percival; 'but I can't say that it did not apply to poor old Lambert. However, the whole thing is nonsense and fiddlesticks.'

'I saw him. He drew his finger along the letters, and then they became luminous. When I uttered an exclamation, he turned his face round to me.'

'My dear T——! the whole is a delusion. You have been over-exciting yourself—not about the jam and cherries in brandy, as the doctor thinks, but about other things. There has been Physic, or someone, frightening you concerning a will of Lambert's. I know there has. You spoke to me about it. Very well; the point is established. You have been fretting over Lambert. Very natural that, when a little out of health, you should fancy you saw him. Then you say you read that inscription on the tombstone last Sunday. You had been thinking of that, and you came to associate Lambert with the words. So, when your heated imagination conjured him up, it also made him scribble those lines. I don't know that I ever came across a ghost story so simple of explanation. Send the thoughts of the poor old fellow back into the grave to sleep with him, and bother the Latin. It is not a fit inscription over any Christian. And, to please the doctor, don't think of the jam and brandy cherries. So you will be all right in a day or two.'

'I shall not be all right till the battle is over.'

'What battle?'

'The battle of life.'

'You have no cause to fight it.'

'Not, perhaps, the same battle as of old. But I cannot rest—I will not say on my laurels, for I have won none, but on a bed of poppies.'

'What have you to disturb you now?'

'Formerly, in that Bohemia in which we had to live—though neither of us belonged to it—we had a struggle for existence. I had to earn my daily bread, to strive under a thousand adverse circumstances, and to maintain my integrity through all—not an easy matter in Bohemia. The atmosphere is enervating there to the moral sense, though stimulating to the mental powers. However, I held my own; but it was a hard fight, and at last I broke down. My heart gave way, and I was forbidden to undertake any more professional work in concerts. Then I came very near to starvation. You know the rest. Your dear hand helped me.'

She looked fondly in Percival's face, and put up her lips to kiss him.

'You helped me. You placed me where I am. I am in a new sphere.'

'I see—you worry now because you have Jane and the world of Common Place to fight. The pious don't know what to make of you. Leave Jane alone, and concern yourself no more about her. It is a leaden weight crushing your heart. Shake it off.'

'It is not that. I am making no fight for position, or for recognition in my position. I am content with the place, your love, and Justinian's regard. I have had other troubles.'

'Oh, that affair about the three hundred pounds! Indigent relatives. Confound them! Now, take my advice, T——. It is that I gave you when they began to worry you. Refer them all to Physic, or to me; we will settle them between us. Do not allow them to tease you any longer. Now that your health suffers, it won't do. I shall be angry, and send the police after them.'

'It was not altogether that——'

'Then what was it?'

She remained silent. She could not tell him.

'Now, look here, dearest T——,' said Percival. 'If you have any bother, put it into Physic's hands. He is paid to take this sort of thing off our shoulders, and he can manage it much better than we can. It is his business, and it don't worry him. Indeed, he rather likes it. However, let all these matters be put aside now. You must on no account excite yourself. Let us change the topic. What will amuse you? What do you say to letting me see the Curgenvén jewelry. I never have seen it. Come, let me have the key, and I will bring the case here. It will divert your thoughts, and will give me a pleasure.'

'Oh, Percy, please not!'

'Yes—your mind must be directed into another channel. Women love jewelry. Where is the key?'

She gave him what he asked for, and in a few minutes he brought the case to her bed. Then Percival moved the lamp near to the bed, and lighted all the candles in the room. 'I must see the diamonds sparkle,' he said.

He unlocked the case and produced each article in the order in which it lay in the velvet-lined trays.

'I have a list of them all and their estimated values,' said Percival. 'That was all taken after Lambert's death, but there is a list that Jane gave me as well. And I see there is one in the box. It is as well to have several lists in case of accident or robbery.'

Percival continued for some time trifling with and admiring the jewels, under the impression that he was giving pleasure to his wife, or at all events diverting her thoughts from the topics that had occupied them.

'T——, my love, next year Justinian is of age, and we will give a great ball then. You shall wear the diamond necklace Queen Anne gave to Lady Margaret Curgenvan, and the tiara also. It will be a pleasure to see you in them, and I'll swear finer diamonds are not to be seen in Cornwall. I said something to-day about a ball, and you should have seen how Lady Tregontick and the girls jumped. She at once told me that she was coming to call on you. And you may be quite certain that every mother with a marriageable daughter will put her scruples in her pocket and come and see you—for Justinian's sake. I do not think there are many who would not give their ears to see a daughter married to the heir of Curgenvan. The women have been hanging back because Jane has done mischief. But Jane does not direct their consciences; self-interest does that.'

He looked round at his wife. Her eyes were closed.

'You are tired,' he said; 'I am afraid I have talked too much. I will put the jewels away where you keep them, and bring back the key. The place is safe, unless a burglar got into your room.'

Percival kissed Theresa and left. Her hands were folded under the bedclothes over her heart.

What was to be done? After what Percival had said, it was not possible for her to dispose of the jewels. Next year she would

be required to wear them—at the coming of age of Justinian. She was woman enough to feel satisfaction at the thought that in spite of Jane Curgenven she would be recognised by the county. What Percival had said was true. The squirearchy, or rather the female adherents of the squires, would swallow their prejudices, tread down their doubts, and receive her among themselves, if not cordially, at all events formally, for the sake of a ball and of the chance of catching Justinian. Jane would, of course, not come to the ball, but would hear the carriages drive past the rectory on the way to the Hall, carriage succeeding carriage, and be taught thereby that she was defeated—the scorned woman was Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven. No one loves to be trampled on. Theresa cared for no better revenge than this, though she had in her power the means of executing a terrible one on her rival. She might bow herself and bring down the house, but, like Samson, to her own destruction; and it would be poor satisfaction to be buried under the same ruins with Jane Curgenven.

The morrow was the day of decision.

If Theresa remained at home, the affairs of the Curgenven family would settle themselves. The wheel would turn, and the revolution would be complete. She, and Percival, and Justinian would be cast on the world, and Jane, with a blasted name and her child branded as a bastard, would occupy Curgenven without being qualified to bear the name of Curgenven.

What could she do? She could not endure this prospect. Weared to death, worn out with struggle, her health failing, her spirits broken, she was unequal to the task of recommencing life in poverty. She thought of the drudgery of existence when every shilling has to be considered. The strain to make both ends of a very short purse meet—she was unequal to it. Twenty years ago she would cheerily have faced poverty. It was now twenty years too late.

But how avert the danger?

The jewels she could not surrender. Even if she suffered them to be held in pawn, could she be sure of raising the money to redeem them when needed? Could she be sure that Percival would not ask to see them when they were out of the house? Could she be sure that Physic would not make away with them? perhaps replace the finest diamonds with imitation stones which she could not detect. Was there no alternative, no third course possible? Theresa thought of the words on the tombstone, and

felt a longing for rest, even if it could be in the harbour of the grave only. For herself it would have been well had she not recovered from the swoon into which she had fallen. But she loved Percival. She loved him with all her heart. He was the one object to which she clung. She clung, knowing his infirmity, but forgiving that for the sake of the great good there was in him. For his sake she would live—live to deliver him, if possible, from the danger menacing him.

Would Physic use the will as he threatened? Might she not trust that he would see that his own interests lay in keeping it in his desk? But there would be no rest from his exactions, no relief from annoyance so long as Physic retained the document. Theresa again asked herself, Was there no third course open to her? And suddenly, with a scorching flash like a lightning-stroke athwart her brain, came the words of the rector. There was a third course. She might threaten him, and wring the will from him through playing on his fears.

(To be continued.)

SOME UNPUBLISHED LETTERS OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.

IT is interesting to observe that the most enthusiastic admirers of Wordsworth are to be drawn, for the most part, from the ranks of his fellow poets, contemporary and following, rather than from the ordinary lovers of poetry, to whom a certain sense of incongruity not uncommonly presents itself in the fact of the poet's adopting, as the source of his inspiration, the more common and matter-of-fact side of things mundane. But to hold the mirror to Nature *as she is* was precisely what the poet conceived to be his mission and province. He was the alchemist by whose art baser metal was turned to gold.

A yellow primrose was something more than a yellow primrose to the eye which had the gift of discerning its inner meaning; and in like manner, the common joys and sorrows of humanity, albeit their pathos might be disguised by the coarse setting of poverty, or distorted and obscured by the narrow limit of human intellect, appealed directly to his heart. He somewhere speaks of the 'humbleness, meanness, if you like, of my subject, together with the homely mode of treating it,' admitting that from motives of policy he would often have excluded that which, for humanity's sake, he puts into verse and publishes.

And, indeed, his whole life is a consistent record of the largest humanitarianism, which, with his sympathy and fellowship with the world of Nature, can be unerringly traced in almost every line of his writings. Neither elaboration of ideas, nor embroidery of language is their main characteristic, but on every page shine out the manly, gentle soul, and the wide comprehensive grasp by which he drew to himself the sympathies and affections of all within his range. A little child's hand, a dog, an insect, a 'wee, pale blossom'—nothing seems to have been too small or too insignificant to be the object of his tender regard.

And we cannot but view Wordsworth with feelings of gratitude while contemplating the pedantry and affectation which mingled so largely with the poetry of his period: those traditional artificialities of style wherein sense was so frequently sacrificed to sound—from all of which Wordsworth, with his earnest struggle for

Truth, and his sturdy, uncompromising aim at Reality, did so much towards delivering us.

It is not, however, the object of the writer of this paper to criticise either the poet or his works, but to transcribe for the benefit of those who may be interested in them, some of his unpublished letters. Before me lies a large number, and in turning them over, one is impressed by their honest simplicity and directness of purpose; their sincerity and warmth of expression, and the intense solicitude they evince for the well-being of those to whom they are addressed.

They also present to one's notice other characteristics which the reader will be quick to observe. Very noticeable, for instance, is the complete absence of playfulness, or anything approaching a sense of fun in any one of the series (there are more than forty), all written to members of the immediate family circle, and some under circumstances that would naturally have given rise to a jest, a light word, or a merry turn to a sentence, had the inclination, or, shall we say, the capacity of the writer tended in any way in that direction.

But, then, who could realise a *humorous* Wordsworth? Search his works through and through, and the poem containing the faintest glimmer of humour remains yet to be discovered. It is as well to note his peculiarity in this respect, because we at once recognise that, had his nature been endowed with the slightest touch of appreciation for the ludicrous, we might have been spared many a jangling note, many a jarring discord which has clashed with the sweet music we love so well.

One solitary suggestion of 'amusement,' as the poet himself puts it, certainly does occur in the letter first quoted. It refers to some lines afterwards published in the *Sonnets to Liberty and Order*, and with it he apparently endeavours to take off the edge, as it were, of the sad theme touched upon in the earlier half of the letter—namely, the mental affliction of his dearly loved sister, Dorothy.

A defect in the MS. has obliterated part of the poem referring to this subject, but it can be found complete in the published works, together with a comment added by the poet, who, as it appears from the words of the letter, was anxious its origin should not be misunderstood. He says: 'The sad condition of poor Mrs. Southey put me upon writing this. It has afforded comfort to many persons whose friends have been similarly affected.'

'MY DEAR DORA,—Read the following remodelling of the Sonnet I addressed to S. The personalities are omitted, a few lines only retained :—

Oh, what a wreck ! How changed in mien and speech !
 Yet, though dread Powers that work in mystery, spin
 Entanglings for her brain ; though shadows stretch
 O'er the chilled heart—reflect ! far, far within
 Hers is a holy Being, freed from sin :
 She is not what she seems, a forlorn wretch ;
 But delegated Spirits comfort fetch
 To her from heights that Reason may not win.

Only illumined by Heaven's pitying love,
 Love pitying innocence, not long to last,
 In them, in Her, our sins and sorrows past.

'The Sonnet, as first sent you and S. may be kept, if thought worthy, as a private record ; the meaning in the passage you object to is certainly not happily brought out ; if you think it better thus, alter it :—

Over the sacred heart compassion's twin,
 The heart that once could feel for every wretch.

The thought in the Sonnet as it now stands has ever been a consolation to me, almost as far back as I can remember, and hope that, thus expressed, it may prove so to others, makes one wish to print it ; but your mother seems to think it would be applied at once to your dear aunt. I own I do not see the force of this objection, but if you and Miss Fenwick, and others, should be of the same mind, it shall be suppressed. It is already sent to the Press, but not as it now stands ; if you think it may be printed without impropriety, pray be so good as to superintend the revise which I shall order the Printer to send you : this would save time, for I could not entrust the revise to the Printer only.

'This is sent for your amusement ; it will go by Mr. Fleming to Cambridge for your cousin John, to be printed without my name, if he thinks it worth while, in the —

Said Secresy to Cowardice and Fraud,
 Falsehood and Treachery, in close council met
 Deep underground in Pluto's cabinet :
 'The frost of England's pride will soon be thawed ;
 Hooded the open brow that overawed
 Our schemes : the faith and honour, never yet
 By us with hope encountered, be upset.
 For once I burst my bands, and cry "Applaud !"

Then whispered she, 'The Bill is carrying out !'
They heard, and starting up, the Brood of Night
Clapp'd hands, and shook with glee their matted locks ;
All Powers and Places that abhor the light
Joined in the transport, echoed back their shout,
Hurrah ! for Grote, hugging his Ballot-box !'

If Dora possessed political tendencies with a leaning towards Conservatism, it may be that she was enabled to derive some entertainment from the rather ponderous levity of the above lines. They had reference, of course, to the introduction of the Ballot Bill into the House of Commons, and so help us to an indication as to when the letter was written ; for, like most of its companions, it is undated. In the printed version of the lines the word 'Grote' is omitted. Possibly, as Mr. Grote was a well-known author in one of the highest walks of literature, as well as a leading politician, the insertion of his name was thought to be an indiscretion : in 1893, however, we can afford to be less particular.

Most of the letters being, as already remarked, undated, it is not easy to arrange them in anything like order. The one given below, however, dates itself by its reference to the work upon which the poet was engaged. The tragedy of *The Borderers* to which he alludes, though written in 1795, was not published till 1842. Wordsworth offers some sort of apology for it, in mentioning certain crudenesses which would not have appeared in it had it been the work of a later period of his life, and remarks also that part of his object in writing it was to preserve in his distinct remembrance what he had observed of transition of character, and the reflections he had been led to make during the time he was a witness of the changes through which the French Revolution passed :—

'MY DEAR DAUGHTER,—I cannot suffer the morning of my birthday to pass without telling you that my heart is full of you and all that concerns you.

'Yesterday was lovely, and this morning is not less so. God grant that we may all have like sunshine in our hearts as long as we remain in this transient world.

'It is about half-past nine ; two hours hence we go to pay a condoling visit to poor Fanny. Mr. Carter, James and I all attended the funeral on Monday ; it was a beautiful afternoon, the light of the declining sun glowing upon Fairfield, as described in the Excursion, at Dawson's Funeral. The Psalm sung before

raising the coffin from its station before the Door, and afterwards, as the procession moved between the trees was most touching. Mr. Greenwood was there and told me the name (which I forget) of the composer, who lived 200 years ago. The music was worthy of the occasion and admirably given, the schoolmaster, a very respectable man, leading the four or five voices : upon these occasions the women do not sing, and I think that is well-judged, the sound being more grand and solemn, whatever it may lose in sweetness, by the want of female tones.

' After the funeral we walked to Mrs. Fletcher's, the place very tempting. They are expected on Saturday.

' I am pretty well, but far from having recovered the strength which I lost through several sleepless nights, the consequence of over, and ill-timed exertion to get the Volume out before Easter, in which attempt I failed. I am glad you like the tragedy. I was myself surprised to find the interest so kept up in the 4th and 5th acts. Of the third I never doubted, and quite agree with you that Herbert's speech is much the finest thing in the drama ; I mean the most moving, or rather, the most in that style of the pathetic which one loves to dwell upon ; though I acknowledge it is not so intensely dramatic as some parts of the 5th act especially.

' As to the first, my only fear was that the action was too far advanced in it. I think the scene where the Vagrant tells her false story has great merit ; it is thoroughly natural, and yet not commonplace nature.

' Some of the sentiments which the development of Oswald's character required will, I fear, be complained of as too depraved for anything but biographical writing.

' With affectionate remembrances to your husband and the girls,

' Ever yours,

' W. W.'

The exquisite lines descriptive of Dawson's funeral service to which he here alludes are to be found in the ' Churchyard among the Mountains,' one of the portions into which ' The Excursion ' is divided. They tell of the burial of a peasant youth, to whom his comrades paid a soldier's honours, and, as they may not be fresh in the minds of all readers, I cannot refrain from quoting them :—

At his funeral hour
Bright was the sun, the sky a cloudless blue—
A golden lustre slept upon the hills ;

And if by chance a stranger wandering there,
 From some commanding eminence had looked
 Down on this spot, well pleased would he have seen
 A glittering spectacle ; but every face
 Was pallid : seldom has that eye been moist
 With tears, that wept not then : nor were the few,
 Who from their dwellings came not forth to join
 In this sad service, less disturbed than we.
 They started at the tributary peal
 Of instantaneous thunder which announced,
 Through the still air, the closing of the Grave ;
 And distant mountains echoed with a sound
 Of lamentation never heard before !

Here is another birthday letter, which may very properly follow the foregoing :—

‘7th April, 1840.

‘MY DEAREST DORA,—Though my left eye has been rather troublesome these two or three last days, I cannot forbear writing to you, and let the letter serve for dear Miss Fenwick also, upon the morning of my seventieth birthday.

‘I am, thank Almighty God ! in excellent health, and so is your dear Mother, and though some of my thoughts upon this occasion are naturally serious, even to sadness, I am, upon the whole, in a cheerful state of mind.

‘The day is bright as sunshine can make it, and the air fraught with as much stir and animating noise as the wind can put into it.

‘Your Mother finds her ankles weak from the shock and sprain of her fall and consequent confinement, or I should have tempted her out with me to walk on the terrace, from which I have had an entertaining view of the merriment of the servants, with help from Arthur Jackson and his brother, shaking the glittering dust out of the carpets.

‘Sister is very comfortable, and we are going on nicely, though wishing much for your return. Yesterday I dined with Mrs. Luff, after calling at the house high up Loughrigg side, where dwells the good woman who lost her two children in the flood last winter.

‘The wind was high when I knocked at her door, and I heard a voice from within that I knew not what to make of, though it sounded something like the lullaby of a Mother to her Baby. After entering, I found it came from a little sister of those drowned children, that was singing to a bunch of clouts rudely put together to look like a doll which I beheld in her arms.

'I tell you this little story in order that, if it be perfectly convenient, but on no account else, you may purchase a thing that may answer the purpose with something more of pride and pleasure to this youngling of a nurse.

'Such is your mother's wish; I should not have had the wit to think of it. No matter, she says, how common a sort of thing the Doll is, only let it be a good big one.

'Dear Miss Fenwick, Mrs. Luff does not wish to part with her sofas, but they are quite at your service, and she should be pleased you would use them, till she has a house of her own. But that time is, she fears, distant; her American property is so unpromising that she has scruples about taking Old Brathay. Now should she decline it, might it not, as the owner is willing to make some improvement, accommodate you for a time? I don't much like the thought, but, as a *pis-aller*, it might possibly do until Mr. Hill may be tempted to give his cottage up.

'I find from a talk with Mrs. Fleming, that they are disposed to make improvements could they let it for a term; and a term, with liberty, of course, to underlet, is what you want. But all this we long to talk over with you, among a thousand reasons for wishing you back again.

'It had escaped my recollection when we heard about the woods and forests, and the Villars' kindness, that I talked this matter over with Lord Lowther, when he was Surveyor of that department, and he told me there was scarcely a single office under him that was an object, at least *then* a come-at-able one.

'Were he in England now, I should be inclined to ask him if my recollection be correct. But I must leave, which I do, dearest friends, with love to you both, and wishes for many happy returns of your own birthdays.

'Ever most affectionately yours,

'WM. WORDSWORTH.

'Mrs. Pedder is putting up a new staircase in some part of the house for the convenience of her new tenant. Dearest Dora, your mother tells me she shrinks from copies being spread of those Sonnets; she does not wish one, at any rate, to be given to Miss Gillies, for that, without blame to Miss G., would be like advertising them. I assure you her modesty and humble mindness were so much shocked, that I doubt if she had more pleasure than pain from these compositions, though I never poured out anything more truly from the heart.'

The lines alluded to in the concluding words of this letter are probably those addressed to his wife, beginning—

Oh ! dearer far than light and life are dear,

for in the same poem he afterwards comments on her diffidence—

That sigh of thine, not meant for human ear,
Tells that these words thy humbleness offend, &c.

Yet the praise bestowed upon her strikes one as being founded mainly on her qualifications for being a sympathetic mate for himself, rather than on her individual merit. This is certainly his meaning with regard to her personal appearance :—

Heed not though none should call thee fair,
So, Mary, let it be,
If nought in loveliness compare
With what thou art to me, &c.

Mrs. Wordsworth, with all her beauty of expression, was undoubtedly a plain woman ; and this is what may be called putting the fact into plain language. But if she could make no boast of good looks, neither was the poet himself remarkable for beauty of feature, or comeliness of form ; while his extreme inattention to little matters of detail in dress was always more or less marked. I cannot forbear quoting an amusing incident lately told me by an old friend (a grand-niece of Mrs. Wordsworth), who, when a child in her parents' home at Durham, remembers one afternoon an announcement being made to her mother that a man wished to speak to her ; and that as he appeared very tired, and seemed to have walked a long distance, he had been accommodated with a seat in the kitchen. My friend's mother, like most country residents, was not unaccustomed to interviewing people of all sorts and conditions, and having finished the letter upon which she was engaged, proceeded leisurely to the kitchen, expecting perhaps some application for employment, or, possibly, to hear a tale of sickness or distress among her humbler neighbours. Her dismay may be imagined when, seated hat in hand upon a Windsor chair, and absently contemplating the weights of the Dutch clock upon the opposite wall, she discovered the Poet Laureate.

My informant, who was scarcely of an age to appreciate the beauty of the poet's conversation, confesses to an industrious though fruitless attempt on her part to count the number of buttons missing from the distinguished visitor's gaiters on this interesting occasion.

The following letter, addressed to his wife and daughter jointly,

is valuable from the mention, or rather the criticism, of the very well-known poem dedicated to Edith Southey, Sara Coleridge, and Dora Wordsworth, and entitled *The Triad*. In this letter, however, Wordsworth calls it *The Promise*. The stanzas here given are quoted in full, because they differ very materially from the printed version, and it is extremely interesting to compare them.

Thursday.

' DEAREST M. and D.—From what I learn Mrs. Gee is left in such narrow circumstances that on that account alone it will be better not to stay more than three weeks with her at ——.

' I could wish to assist Mrs. Gee, tell her, in disposing of her portion of the Langdale Estate, but you are aware that no complete title can be made to it till little Mary M. is of age, so that I fear it will be almost an insurmountable objection. I will try. I shall be hurt if you do not so contrive as to spend at least a month at Cambridge with Dr. W. It is not necessary that I should be there to meet you, I will follow as soon as I can. . . . John arrived day before yesterday, looking well and apparently in good spirits. Bills to the amount of upwards of £60, including the one paid by Mr. Jackson, have been sent for Battles, the Taylor's bill not included. Seven pounds for a new suit was also left at Cambridge, so that with use of furniture and John's journey and settling, &c., the expenses on John's account will be very formidable.

' This was my main inducement for closing with Mr. Reynold's offer for the *Keepsake*. I have already written all that will be necessary to fulfill my engagement, but, I wish to write a small narrative poem by way of variety, in which case I shall defer something of what is already written till another year, if we agree.

' I have written one little piece, 34 lines, on the Picture of a beautiful Peasant-Girl bearing a sheaf of corn. The person I had in my mind lives near the Blue Bell, Fillingham—a sweet creature: we saw her going to Hereford.

' Another piece, 82 lines, same Stanza as Ruth, is entitled *The Wishing-Gate at Grasmere*. Both have, I think, merit. . . .

' Wm. continues in good spirits and sufficiently industrious. Say to Mr. Monkhouse C. Wilson's behaviour shews the good sense of Dr. Venables' advice.

' Have nothing to do with Quillinan. I am sorry for his disappointment. I hope dear Dora's looks are better, and that she

will collect some flesh as Edith did. I will add for her a few additional lines for *The Promise*, that is the title of the poem. After "Where grandeur is unknown," add—

What living man would fear
The worst of Fortune's malice, wert thou near,
Humbling that lilly-branch, thy sceptre meek,
To brush from off his cheek
The too, too happy tear ?
Queen and handmaid lowly ! &c.

Before "Next to these shades a Nymph" &c., read this :—

Like notes of Birds that after showers
In April concert try their powers,
And with a tumult and a rout
Of warbling, force coy Phoebus out ;
Or bid some dark cloud's bosom show
That form divine, the many coloured Bow.
E'en so the thrillings of the Lyre
Prevail to further our desire,
While to these shades a Nymph I call,
The youngest of the lovely three :
With glowing cheeks from pastimes virginal
Behold her hastening to the tents
Of nature, and the lonely elements !
And, as if wishful to disarm
Or to repay the tuneful charm,
She bears the stringed lute of old Romance, &c.

For "With the *happy* Rose enwreathed," on account of the "happy tears" above, read 'With *Idalian* rose.'

Read thus :—

Only ministers to quicken
Sallies of instinctive wit ;
Unchecked in laughter-loving gaiety
In all the motions of her spirit free.

After that lovely line, "How light her air, her delicate glee!" the word "glee" ought not to occur again.

'Farewell, dearest loves. I have shown the above additions to nobody, even in this house; so I shall shut up my letter that neither it nor they may be read. Love to all at both houses. Again farewell.

'Your affectionate husband and father,

'W. W.'

The 'Dr. W.' alluded to in the earlier part of the foregoing letter was the poet's younger brother, and the father of the late Bishop of St. Andrews, whose reminiscences have recently been

published. Mrs. Gee, whose name appears frequently in the letters, had at one time a school at Hendon, Dora Wordsworth being one of her pupils.

The marriage of their only daughter, Dora, was a severe trial to the poet and his wife. Mr. Quillinan, of Portuguese extraction, and himself a poet of some pretension, was a widower with two little girls. His first wife was the daughter of Sir Egerton Brydges (of whom Carlyle says, ‘he has a small vein of real worth in him, and knows several things’), and he must have been considerably older than Dora; but the main objection advanced by her parents to the marriage was on the grounds of his being a Roman Catholic.

Among the papers are two short letters touching this subject, which are here transcribed. It will be seen that notwithstanding the fatherly affection conveyed in them, there exists also a strong current of objection underlying and qualifying his expressions of satisfaction.

‘Sunday morning, Nine o’clock.

‘**MY DEAREST DORA**,—I am looking for Mr. Quillinan every moment. I hope to revive the conversation of yesterday.

‘The sum is:—I make no opposition to this marriage. I have no resentment connected with it towards anyone; you know how much friendship I have always felt towards Mr. Q., and how much I respect him. I do not doubt the strength of his love and affection towards you: this, as far as I am concerned, is the fair side of the case.

‘On the other hand, I cannot think of parting with you with that complacency, that satisfaction, that hopefulness which I could wish to feel: there is too much of necessity in the case for my wishes. But I must submit, and do submit; and God Almighty bless you, my dear child, and him who is the object of your long, and long-tried preference and choice.

‘Ever your affectionate father,

‘WM. WORDSWORTH.

‘I have said little above of your dear mother, the best of women. O how my heart is yearning towards her, and you, and my poor dear sister.

‘My uncle is rather worse this morning than yesterday at this time. Would that the next week were fairly over!

‘I enjoyed the Ballet of the Opera last night.’

‘Thursday.

‘ Your letter to me just received. Thanks : I will write from Brinsop—W. W.

‘ MY DEAR DAUGHTER,—The letter which you must have received from Wm. has placed before you my judgment and feelings : how far you are reconciled to them I am unable to divine. I have only to add that I believe Mr. Q. to be a most honourable and upright man, and further, that he is most strongly and faithfully attached to you : this I must solemnly declare in justice to you both ; and to this I add *my blessing upon you and him*—more I cannot do, and if this does not content you with what your brother has said, we must all abide by God’s decision upon our respective fates. Mr. Q. is, I trust, aware how slender my means are ; the state of Wm.’s health will undoubtedly entail upon us considerable expense, and how John is to get on without our aid, I cannot foresee. No more at present, my time is out ; I am going to join Miss Fenwick at Miss Pollard’s.

‘ Ever your most tender-hearted and affectionate father,

‘ WM. WORDSWORTH.

‘ In a beautiful churchyard near Bath I saw, the other day, this inscription :—

THOMAS CARROL, Esq.,

BARRISTER AT LAW

Born—so, died—so,

Rest in peace, dear Father.

‘There was not another word.’

One can hardly avoid commenting on the curiously irrelevant nature of the postscripts appended to these two letters, called forth by a circumstance so near to the father’s heart, and presumably written under high pressure. That in the former, especially, referring to the Ballet at the Opera, strikes one as being particularly out of keeping with the feeling of the few lines above it. Evidently the ‘Order of Things,’ upon which Oliver Wendell Holmes so frequently insists, had little place in the poet’s mind, a noticeable fact, not only in this, but in many other instances, where his want of a certain sense of congruity now and then occurs to us.

Some of the early letters from Wordsworth to Quillinan are extremely friendly ; they were evidently written before the latter had presented himself definitely in the light of a future son-in-law to his mind. The allusion to his ‘disappointment,’ in a letter

already quoted, coupled with the recommendation to his wife and daughter to have 'nothing to do with Quillinan,' was probably occasioned by one of Dora's repeated refusals of his suit.

But it is to be presumed that the Wordsworths, although not desirous of connecting themselves by marriage with the Quillinan family, always took an intimate and kindly interest in the children.

Mrs. Quillinan's tragic end (she died from shock to the system, consequent on a narrow escape from death by burning) would naturally dispose them to look with a friendly and compassionate eye upon her motherless children, and especially on the forlorn little baby; to whom Wordsworth, notwithstanding the difference in creed, was induced to stand godfather, and whom he called Rotha after the beautiful river Rotha, whose banks he loved so well.

It was not for some considerable time, however, that Dora consented to become Mr. Quillinan's wife, and she died a victim to consumption, only a very few years after her marriage.

The following letter addressed to Mr. Quillinan is a compound one, half of the sheet being written by Wordsworth, and the rest covered in large text-hand by little Rotha, whom he had just escorted from her home to spend a time with the family at Rydal Mount.

Miss Sara Hutchinson, the poet's sister-in-law, comments on this visit in a letter also lying before me: she mentions how the poet during the drive, becoming suddenly impressed with his responsibilities, asks the little one to repeat aloud with him the Lord's Prayer. 'Rotha,' to quote from Miss Hutchinson, 'was conscious that there was something ridiculous in their so doing in such a situation,' and though complying with the request in duty bound, hastily tacks on to the closing words of the Prayer a fervent 'I hope the Driver didn't hear us!' which seems to have given rise to much amusement all round, excepting to the poet himself; he, good man, apparently seeing nothing whatever incongruous in his innocent suggestion.

The child's letter (to her little sister Jemima) is far too pretty to be omitted. The orthography and construction are apparently all her own.

'April 29th, 1831.

'MY DEAR MIMA,—I got to rydal on thur about 7 o'clock. it is such a pretty place. I am sorry to say mrs. Wordsworth has got the lumbago very bad. there is a picture of you in my room with little flora and I think it is like you. there is a picture of

papa too but I do not think it is much like him tell Eliza I have bought the doll it has light hair and blue eyes and also give my love to her. The students at cambridge have such funy caps and gowns I went one Sunday Trinity college chapel and all of the students wear surprises I dont know wether I have spelt it right.

' Believe me to be your affectionate sister Rotha Quillinan there is such a larg dog called neptun almost as large as a calf, so If he jumped upon me he would most likely turn me over.'

' MY DEAR FRIEND,—I cannot suffer this letter to go without a word from me: and first of dear Mrs. Wordsworth—her complaint is lumbago and sciatica, the younger sister and scarcely distinguishable from tic-douleuroux. But here my poetical reputation served us. I knew no one in Nottingham, but bethought me of the Howitts. There are two brothers of them—on one I called to state my situation; and found that there was a third Brother, a Physician. Him I sent for, and Wm. and Mary Howitt insisted on the invalid being brought to their house, which was a great comfort on the eve of an Election. We made one attempt to move her in vain, in the afternoon we succeeded, and she passed through the wide Market-place of Nottingham, wrapped in a blanket (she could not be dressed), and in a chair, followed by a 100 boys and curious persons. So that she preceded Sir Thomas Denham and Ferguson in the honour of being chaired, and was called by us Parliament Woman for the loyal Borough of Nottingham.

' As to Rotha she is a sweet, clever child, and we were the best companions in the world. As Miss H. says, we must take care not to spoil her; she is wonderfully intelligent.

' God bless you. I am called away.

' Ever faithfully and gratefully yours,

' W. WORDSWORTH.

' Love to Jemima.'

This little incident of Mrs. Wordsworth's illness and removal to the Howitts' house is duly recorded also in Mary Howitt's pleasant autobiography. She speaks of the year 1831 as 'a memorable one' to her, by reason of the Wordsworths' visit, but we will give it in her own words. 'This day week,' she writes in her diary, 'as we were dressing in the morning, Mr. Wordsworth was announced. He was on his way from London,

and Mrs. Wordsworth, who was with him, was taken ill on the road, and had arrived in great agony in Nottingham, the night before. He came, poor man, in much perplexity to ask our advice. We recommended that Godfrey should see her, and insisted on her removal to our house, which was accomplished with some difficulty the same afternoon. Here she has accordingly been since : she is now nearly recovered. Wordsworth greatly pleased me. He is worthy of being the author of *The Excursion* and *Ruth*, and those sweet poems of human sympathy. Not less are we pleased with Mrs. Wordsworth and her lovely daughter, Dora.

'They are the most grateful people : everything we do for them is right, and the very best it can be.'

In a letter which is published in *The Memoirs*, we find the poet stating that he 'derived benefit from Mr. Quillinan's help and judgment ;' and from the correspondence now under our notice, it would appear that there was a frequent interchange between the friends, of criticism on their respective productions. The subjoined extract of a letter to Mr. Quillinan evidently refers to some work of the latter's submitted for the poet's inspection, and apparently accompanied by a request for a candid opinion upon its merits.

His comments upon it are here transcribed at length, because it is interesting to observe the exact shade of meaning which, by his own showing, certain words conveyed to the poet's mind ; and his friendly criticism of Mr. Quillinan's verse helps us, moreover, to form an idea of the careful and minute study he probably bestowed upon his own composition before sending it to the press, in order to ensure the entire suitability of every word to the expression of his thought. This is the more noteworthy because Wordsworth has been accused by more than one critic, of a certain blunt carelessness in penning down his first crude impressions, without taking sufficient trouble to adapt them to the exigencies of verse.

Unfortunately the subject criticised is not within our reach, but we can easily dispense with it in the light of the very comprehensive comments made by its critic, and the thoroughly clear manner in which he makes his meaning evident.

'We have read your verses,' he says, 'with much pleasure ; they want neither eye nor feeling, and are upon the whole, which is saying a great deal, worthy of the subject. But the expression

is here and there faulty, as I am pretty sure you must be yourself aware.

“ ‘Piles’ ought to be *pile*, but ‘aisles,’ a necessary word, has caused a sacrifice to rhyme. ‘Exstatic’ is a word not too strong perhaps though referring to stone, considered apart from the human heart, but coupled with it thus it strikes me as being so.

‘To “conscious pillars” I should have preferred an epithet addressed to the sight, and appropriate to architecture. I should like *chequered* better than “mottled,” which is a word almost always used in unfavourable or mean sense—as mottled with measles, mottled soap, &c.

‘“By her *sculpture*” seems too strong a word for the touch of the moon; and “flecked,” as far as I am acquainted with the word, applies to spots on the surface having reference to shade or colour, and not to incision.

‘The primary sense—that most frequently used—of the word *anatomy*, being the art or act of dissection, causes some obscurity or confusion joined with the phrase of what he was, which might be avoided, though perhaps with some loss of force, if it was not for the confusion, by altering the passage thus:—

“ His grim anatomy

So fall the rays *shed by the moon*, that in their silent strife,
or *from the clear moon*.

‘A better epithet might be found than “*swelling* with richness bland.”

‘You must be well aware that this is the worst line in the poem. All the rest is beautiful in feeling, as it is faultless in expression.’

Besides such friendly criticisms as the above, there occur in the letters frequent mentions of mutual acquaintances and friends—of ‘dear Southey,’ his troubles and misfortunes, ‘thorns in his side not of his own planting’; and here and there some touching allusions to Hartley Coleridge, of whom the same cannot be said.

‘He’ (the latter) ‘is wandering about like a vagabond, sleeping in barns, without the dignity of gypsy life, and picking up a meal where he can, in and about Ambleside.’

This sad subject evidently stirred him most deeply; and the manner in which he occasionally alludes to it recalls to mind Harriet Martineau’s description of his tender, loving treatment of his unfortunate friend.

'As long as there was any chance of good from remonstrance and rebuke,' writes Miss Martineau, 'Wordsworth administered both sternly and faithfully; but when nothing more than pity and help was possible, Wordsworth treated him as gently as if he had been a sick child.'

This devotion and pitying care for the hapless being he had once called friend, call forth our warmest admiration; more especially when we take into consideration certain strong prejudices of his nature, which must have caused him to shrink painfully from anything so degraded as Hartley Coleridge had become. Yet he ministered to him unceasingly during the latter days of his life; devotedly tending him in his last illness, and faithfully accompanying him to that grave, in the little churchyard among the mountains, close by the spot where his own remains are now resting.

One cannot but recall the pathetic little poem 'to H. C., aged 6 years,' and wonder whether its closing lines had place in his mind that day, as he bowed his aged head over poor Hartley's coffin:—

What hast thou to do with sorrow,
Or the injuries of to-morrow?
Thou art a dew-drop which the morn brings forth;
Ill fitted to sustain unkindly shocks,
Or to be trailed along the soiling earth;
A gem that glitters while it lives,
And no forewarning gives,
But at the touch of wrong, without a strife,
Slips in a moment out of life.

From the following extract from another letter to Quillinan, the reader may be interested in learning that the bitter cry of the author against the publisher might have been heard in the land even in Wordsworth's day, who very plainly puts forth his views on this point and also on the copyright question, apparently then, as now, a burning subject for discussion. Possibly some public reform in this matter was under contemplation when the lines were penned.

'I do not acknowledge the force of the objections made to my publishing the specimens of Chaucer, nevertheless I have yielded to the judgments of others, and have not sent more than the *Cuckoo and Nightingale*.

'Tegg is what you say. He has written two long and stupid letters to the *Times*, in one of which the blockhead says, "Look at the profits, the enormous ones of such and such people——"

'The large and increasing instant demand for literature of a certain quality holds out the strongest temptation to men who could do better, writing below themselves to suit the taste of the superficial many. What we want is not books to catch purchasers themselves not worth a moment's notice, not light but solid matter, not things treated in a broad and coarse, or, at best, a superficial way, but profound or refined works comprehensive of human interests through time as well as space. *Kotzebue* was acted and read at once from Cadiz to Moscow; what has become of him now?

'But Tegg has the impudence to affirm that another *Paradise Lost*, or a poem as good, would at once produce 10,000*l.* from Mr. Murray and others. *Credat Judaeus Apella.* *Paradise Lost* is indeed bought because people for their own credit must now have it. But how few, how very few read it; when it is read by the multitude, it is almost exclusively not as a poem, but a religious book.

'But even were it true that substantial work would at once secure a wide circulation, justice would still be violated by withholding from the descendants or heirs of a great author the further advantage he is so strongly entitled to. The wretch Tegg says his "line is to watch expiring copyrights;" and would be no doubt, if he dared, to murder the authors for the sake of getting sooner at his prey. But too much of this disgusting subject.'

It seems that the poet, with all his habitual gentleness and mildness of manner, had nevertheless some strong opinions of his own on certain matters, and lacked not the courage on occasions to speak his mind. Here is an amusing reference to Chauncey Hare Townsend, an unorthodox parson of the day, whose literary remains, by the way, were afterwards gathered together and edited by Charles Dickens. The reverend gentleman has somehow or other fallen under the ban of his displeasure, in part, we gather, on account of some comment or criticism on Wordsworth's composition, not too politely expressed.

'The Rev. Chauncey Hare Townsend,' he writes, 'is as pretty a rascal as ever put on a surplice. He is one of Southey's most intimate friends, and has been so for about a dozen or fourteen years, during a good part of which period I have occasionally seen him on very friendly terms, both at Cambridge where I have dined with him, and at my own house where he has slept and where he

was cordially received twice, while this attack upon my person and writing was in process.

'The thing, as an intellectual production, is safe in its own vileness. Who that ever felt a line of my poetry would trouble himself to crush a miserable maggot crawled out of the dead carcass of the *Edinburgh Review*? But too much of this.'

He also indulges not infrequently in caustic remarks on women who write, towards whom he always retained a rooted objection. It is said that after Miss Martineau took up her residence in his neighbourhood, this abhorrence to authoresses sometimes took such active expression that the deaf lady was frequently obliged to *see* what she could not *hear*, and perforce, to recognise that her presence was unwelcome at Rydal Mount. She herself, however, makes no mention of anything of the kind, when alluding to the Wordsworths, and her intercourse with them.

On one occasion, after unsparingly condemning a work by Miss Sedgwick, he concludes his criticism thus: 'Such productions add to my dislike of Literary Ladies—indeed make me almost detest the name.' And further on again I find the rather sweeping announcement that 'blue stockinism is sadly at enmity with true refinement of mind.' This last is said in reference to Sara Coleridge, whom he rather pettishly accuses of monopolising Mr. Quillinan's attention on one occasion, during the time of the latter's engagement to his daughter Dora. Perhaps, as the remark is made in a letter to Quillinan himself, something in the nature of a tacit reproof may be included in it for him also.

That Wordsworth entertained a high ideal of womanhood in the abstract is undoubtedly, and is evident in most of his poetry; but it is equally true that he could ill support contradiction or interference from the ladies of his own family, from whom, by the way, he was likely to meet with very little of either. He was lord paramount in his home; the central figure of a group of devoted and faithful admirers, who could see no flaw in anything he said or did. His sister and his sister-in-law resided constantly with them, joining wife and daughter in one invariable chant of praise of his great gifts, and veneration for his genius.

Under such circumstances who could wonder at the growing weakness for universal approbation which is said to have beset, in his latter days, the grand old Lake poet?

Doubtless also the ubiquitous British tourist, who still stalks

the earth dealing out desolation wherever he penetrates, has much to answer for from his pernicious custom of hunting down celebrities with unceasing incursions on their privacy.

When reviewing the lives of most men of mark we are generally able to observe that one particular period in their career will stand out in brilliant relief to the rest: we can, as a rule, point unmistakably to the rise, the climax, and the subsidence of power in the rather rare instances of longevity in connection with genius.

In Wordsworth's case the zenith of his poetical inspiration was concentrated into a remarkably short space of time; and he was doubtless painfully aware, in the closing years of his long life, of his inability to reach his own earlier standard. In some of these very letters there is abundant evidence that such was the case. *Non sum qualis eram* is the pathetic burden of several of them. It may be that a natural anxiety to make the most of the high reputation he had so justly won, and of the waning of which he may have been unhappily conscious, resulted, in his old age, in a tenacious craving for outward and visible signs of that sort of popularity which, in former days, he had probably regarded with indifference.

However this may be, a fitting conclusion to these suggestions may be found in one more quotation of his own words, arising from the consideration of the praises bestowed upon great and good men:—

'The noblest of mankind,' he observes, 'have been found, when intimately known, to be of characters so imperfect that no eulogist can find a subject which he will venture upon with the animation necessary to create sympathy, unless he confines himself to a particular art, or he takes something of a one-sided view of the person he is disposed to celebrate.'

'This,' he adds, 'is a melancholy truth.'

USEFUL PEOPLE.

IT is satisfactory to know that hunger, thirst, and cold, as well other groups in the great family of pain, are the first and greatest teachers of mankind. Without them we should have been eating acorns, chipping flints, and making ourselves as comfortable as might be in the company of other 'species.' We are fortunate in learning this, for it gives a colour to the accepted saying that 'there is a use for everything.' Probably our test has been its fitness to our own convenience and taste. Thus, though the sting of a bee and a wasp is equally painful, we destroy the nests of the one, and tax our ingenuity in constructing the most commodious hives for the other. Veal, jelly, and sweetbread commend the calf (from head to heel) on its way towards the production of beef, butter, milk, and cheese, to say nothing of hide. Otherwise, mere picturesqueness would hardly have led to the careful preservation of cows on the alp and in the meadow. Lions and tigers, too, provide pleasure for the moneyed sportsman, as well as hearthrugs, and instructive entertainment at the Zoo. To their black fellow-countrymen these beasts are less attractive. It may be interesting, moreover, to read about herds of wild horses; but the adjunct of harness presents them in a different light. Though Darwin has revealed their intelligence, and shown the part they play in renovating the face of the earth, we have been accustomed to value 'worms' only as bait. . . . their worth as such being seen from another point of view by themselves. It may be difficult, indeed, to realise the usefulness of much in the 'world of insignificance,' as with grubs which destroy our crops, and mosquitoes, especially when these show (so travellers tell us) like a mist over the prairie, and a man has only to clap his hands if he wishes to kill a hundred; still, in the case, say, of the 'turnip fly,' the most tiresome insect helps in the development of agricultural ingenuity, and takes its place along with hunger and thirst, heat and cold, in making 'Man' bethink and bestir himself. Without a host of disagreeable incentives the rise of civilisation would have been unknown.

Manifold other factors enter the question when we begin to

talk about ‘useful people,’ and ask ourselves when and how any one can claim a right to this gratifying prefix. It is hard to find an obviously suitable entrance into so complex a problem, and impossible to define in a few words a thing which presents so many sides as ‘usefulness.’

In the first place, it must be admitted that some eminently ‘useful’ people are anything but agreeable. Think of the ‘wet blanket.’ It would be difficult to overvalue the good which he frequently does. We concoct promising schemes, and, in all honesty, are persuaded that they are sure to be effective. But (in the heat of pleasurable creation) something has been overlooked, some condition essential to success has been forgotten. Who shall bell the cat? The mice look at one another in dismay. Many people have exhausted themselves in efforts to discover ‘perpetual motion,’ which would, presumably, be of use if realised. I knew an old gentleman in a country village who bewildered Hodge by the importation of huge costly iron cylinders, levers, and cranks which were to revolutionise the world of practical science. One receptacle, at last, came to be used as a water tank; another eventually served the purpose of a pig-trough. All the would-be inventor’s time and money might have been saved if only some provoking friend had first made him try whether he could carry himself in a basket. The floor of the world is strewn with vexatious failures which only wanted the early application of a wet blanket to check the expenditure of useless pains.

I might give a long list of these dampers if I did not believe that none of my readers are ignorant of what they feel like, whether used in the checking of some widely ambitious project, or applied in the privacy of an affectionate home. The best of wives always keep a supply of cooling house-cloths, and (with unexpected skill) know how to clap them on when questionable proposals are laid upon the family table.

I need not say that many ‘useful people’ whose help we foresee, and even invite, but which brings no inevitable pleasure, are often seen in the shape of teachers. Their object, indeed, is not to damp but encourage us; and yet sometimes we are conscious of unpleasant inferiority when we employ them. I am not thinking of the undefined aversion of the schoolboy for Dr. Fell; but though we may sincerely desire instruction, the sense of ignorance which accompanies a request for advice is not always agreeable, especially if we are unable to get it without payment. The pro-

spect of relief from personal pain, or the hope that we may obtain it for another, causes the physician to be looked upon as a welcome friend; but we seldom have the same feeling towards a 'vet.' when a favourite horse has broken its knees, or a stupid cow has tried to swallow a turnip the wrong way. And we do not invariably enter the consulting-room of our 'legal adviser' with a conviction that his 'usefulness' is enjoyable. From the pitiless 'wet blanket' who is allied to those inexorably corrective powers of Nature which educate mankind, to the mildest of instructors who almost apologise for their superior knowledge, there is a procession of 'useful people' whose help we are compelled to accept against the grain, or wish we could manage to do without.

A word about unconscious usefulness. There are simple people who by their persistency serve as warnings against foolishness. This is sometimes allied with vanity, and an example will serve to illustrate what I mean. Take hair-dye. I fear that many, men as well as women, would disguise their white heads if they could be really disguised. It is not for want of invitations that they fail to try, and it must be assumed that hair-dressers find a sufficient response to their advertisements or they would cease to appear. But their resultant ghastliness must ensure the survival of many a grey head which otherwise might have been silly enough to hide itself.

Beside unconsciously useful people there are those who are only too conscious of the use they are put to, and who are distinctly unwilling to be so employed. A man is hanged, for instance, chiefly as a warning to others. He might be kept from further mischief by less final means, and the nature of his punishment prohibits it from being a monition to himself. Jails, too, may be said to make their tenants 'useful' as examples, however reluctant to be so utilised. All conspicuous evil-doers, indeed, though not criminal, serve in some measure to deter the thoughtless when their evil deeds are offensive to others, or seen to be injurious to themselves. The classical precedent of making slaves drunk (probably without aversion on their part) as a dissuasive spectacle for the sober, could hardly be followed now without unpleasant criticism by the Temperance newspapers; but, in fact, compulsion is unhappily needless, since a drunkard is always a warning (however frequently futile), though it is only by a stretch of language that he can be included in the list of 'useful people.'

If we turn to a pleasanter examination of it, a high place must be given to the ‘pioneer,’ though his ‘usefulness’ is often not realised except by himself, and he has to be content with the applause of his own conscience. Though it sometimes even puts him to death for his pains, the world would stand still if it were not for his precocity and perseverance. Even when a ‘leader’ questions no social custom, and advocates no fresh aspect of a creed, when he proposes something which openly commends itself, the world (especially that which is called learned and scientific) carefully guards itself against any suspicion of approval. Just a hundred years ago (in 1792) an inventive English nobleman declared that it was possible to make a ship move by the aid of ‘steam,’ without ‘masts or sails,’ and, having spent as much as he was prepared to afford on repeated costly plans, craved some assistance from the State. Of course the department (being a wet blanket) stringently tied up its loan, but, having become persuaded by the result of his experiments that he had hope of success, it undertook to build a small vessel for the would-be inventor, to be navigated ‘by the steam engine’ on the condition that if it failed ‘all the expense should be made good by him.’ This generous enterprise of Lord Stanhope was highly lauded at the time, the popular verdict being thus expressed, ‘If it answer, the advantage to the public, particularly in inland navigation, will be immense.’ In this case the recognition of a pioneer’s possible ‘usefulness’ was exceptionally favourable. If the Inquisition had then held power in England his ignorance of the mystic wind’s influence might have got him into mischief. But the courage of the true discoverer seldom fails. When Galileo was compelled to recant his heresy about the motion of the earth he whispered to a friend, as he rose from his knees, ‘It moves for all that.’ So, too, at last does the cautious world when some one audaciously proposes to find his way over a stream or gulf which has never been crossed, or about even the existence of which none have ever troubled themselves at all. Your suggestive explorer, nevertheless, affirms that there is something worth knowing or having on the other side. Nobody cares a button for what he says. So he quietly carries a plank of his own to the brink. It is too short, or carried away. At last (if he is not drowned himself) he finds one the right length and lays it firmly down. He toddles carefully over. ‘Look at that fool,’ says the public. But he comes back, declaring that there is something of value on the other

side, and makes several passages, bringing specimens. Presently an inquiring friend makes a trip with him, then another, and another. . . . until in time the sneering world drives up with its cartloads of bricks and timber to build a bridge, because there really is a gold mine on the opposite shore. Pioneers head the regiment of ‘useful people,’ though the column seldom follows close at their heels.

Perhaps one of the most valuable items in a hide-bound society is the man who lifts its wheels out of some hateful rut which all have been afraid to leave. Why afraid? Nobody knows. So he whips his horses, gets clear, and a grateful company makes new tracks upon the road. The leaders of fashion, it must be confessed, sometimes take a wrong turn and drive beauty itself into bondage; but the pioneer (whether man or woman) who, e.g., struck off its hoops may claim to be counted among useful people. There are now, too, professed candidates for that honour, though as yet they have not persuaded ladies that the sweeping of the ‘side-walk’ is more the business of the vestry than of the dressmaker.

What is to be said about those who, unquestionably, burn with desire to benefit their fellows, but whose zeal takes shape in the preaching of some ‘fad’? There are, for instance, vegetarians who, not content with protesting against the use of ‘flesh-meat’ on physiological grounds, or objecting to the association of an innocent lamb with mint sauce, boldly urge that it wholly fulfils its purpose when viewed as a ‘pet,’ and would protect it even from the shears, because there are ‘vegetable fibres’ better suited for the knitting of stockings than ‘lamb’s-wool.’ No doubt many people eat too much meat, and he would be a useful man in his generation who was able to make them believe this; but it is in the nature of a ‘faddist’ to spoil his usefulness by not knowing when to stop. He will not see that plenty of sensible men are provoked at so much good stuff in the way of zeal running to waste. Some wiseacres say, I know that ‘the higher you aim the further you shoot,’ but (let alone the fact that the highest must needs result in the arrow coming down, perhaps on your head, like a rocket stick) there is such a thing as ‘precision’ wanted for hitting a mark, and a tub is not a bit the fuller because the water runs over the brim.

Many men (by the way) have been perplexed how to make a ‘faddist’ useful, or at least how to qualify the violence of his

zeal. Let me advise. If you are associated with one, say on a committee, in the promotion of some desirable end, never contend with him. Admit to the full the excellence of the object in view; let him blow off his steam and make the most exasperating and drastic proposals, and then (while he is limp from the exhaustion of his eloquence) move an amendment aiming at the ‘result’ which he desires. He may possibly think that he has convinced you. Anyhow, you will have a seconder, and the silent thanks of your colleagues. If, unhappily, you find yourself joined with him in double harness, or if one who should be your subordinate runs wild, sever the connection as soon as you can. There is no reason why such small power for usefulness as you may possess yourself should be frustrated by his folly.

It is a long stride from the man who is overdone with anxiety to improve others, and would always set a neighbour’s clock by his own watch, to those whose claim to utility is little more than pictorial. We often see ‘useful ornaments’ advertised for sale, and, when it is equally serviceable, we always prefer a handsome well-shaped article to an ugly one. There are, however, different notions of what is becoming, and I, for one, would rather have an honest copper coal-scuttle show its contents in my drawing-room than a Japan casket, painted perhaps with Cupids and roses, the lid of which always fell upon my scoop when I wanted to feed the fire. But that is not the point. Beauty and usefulness may well meet together. We must admit the claims of those, too, who, having done their work, and done it well, can unbuckle their belts without blame. There is no special merit in a determination to ‘die in harness.’ On the contrary, such a resolve may be most inconvenient to the rest of the team, who would gladly turn the old prig into a paddock. He spoils the pace, and does not pull his weight. They manage these things without appeal in the army. Youth is the time for fighting, and when I see an ‘old soldier’ covered with medals I have to resist an ungallant thought that he has been well drilled in—I think they call it ‘finding cover.’ No doubt it is mortifying for him when an officer, well instructed, sound in wind and limb, eager for active service, and, indeed, fit so to serve, is put on the shelf because he has reached an inexorable birthday; but, after all, military procedure is a lesson on the limits of usefulness which might be followed in other professions, not excluding the legislative and clerical. Anyhow, it is no necessary symptom of idleness in a people when

we see experienced old men ‘standing at ease,’ and perhaps giving themselves no more trouble than to order their dinners. There are rooms in the ‘Rag’ which the young bloods of that military Club have the irreverence to call ‘dormitories.’ Those who thus use them have earned their sleep.

But when we talk about ‘useful people’ what shall be said of such as have been through no campaign, never smelt powder, except in the form of snuff, and whose lack of usefulness has never been disguised by the possession of beauty? Some town idlers (and country too) have, no doubt, been of service in carrying the pollen of acceptable news and pleasant amenities from one social flower to another, and they have been by no means selfish in so doing. They have contributed much that is agreeably valuable to their neighbours, and thus must not be excluded from a place in the list of ‘useful people.’ But your sheer dawdler, who thinks only about himself, and the cultivation of his vanishing appetites and passions, and has never really cared for anything else, may serve as—well—an example of the polish which worthless humanity is capable of taking.

There is a large class of people, however, whose usefulness is only passive. They take no active part in doing good to their generation, though they may be, and often are, held in much esteem by those around them. Probably this comes from their harmlessness—from their making no stir, and never giving utterance to troublesome suggestions. They take things as they are, and when these suit the views of their neighbours, they get credit as benefactors to their race. I am thinking of men with adequate means who live in the same place year after year, and have an appreciable number of others ‘dependent’ upon them, such as tenants, bailiffs, gamekeepers, small tradesmen, peasants, and a wagging tail of promiscuous ‘hangers-on.’ A man in this position, of easy-going temper, who finds employment for those about him, likes the character of being ready to do a kindness, and is too good-natured to mind being sometimes a little imposed upon, is sure to be reckoned among ‘useful people.’ And he deserves a good name. He irritates no one by vexatious reforms in the routine of local procedure, but keeps a welcome level in the discharge of his inherited duties. Still, his unquestionable ‘usefulness’ is little else but that of a ‘pump.’ Not a steam one, under the sole control of its irresponsible proprietor, but an instrument of more value with those who have access to its handle.

The village carpenter, bricklayer, shopkeeper, baker, and tailor have hold of it in turn. It stands over the tank of the good man's resources and generosity. There is no denying its usefulness. All the same, it is a pump of the simplest construction. Probably it stood where it is before he was born, and when he shall be removed (if his son duly fills his place in the eyes of the community), it will be there still. We may, nevertheless, reasonably doubt whether the welfare of a country would be best secured if it were planted throughout with these laudable erections. Something more seems to be required of such as may most fitly be called 'useful people.'

What, asks my reader, could you have better, especially in these days of social anxiety, say, than a kind-hearted judicious landowner who keeps up the traditions of his place, and lives in the midst of a contented people? Ay, there is the rub. It does not follow that 'their' traditions are what 'they' would best like to be preserved, however steadily they go on touching their hats. Some kinds of 'contentment,' moreover, are unwholesome, if not deadly. There is small hope of people who never complain, and he is the really useful man who can discern the symptoms of popular unsettlement and meet its desire, not by a multiplication of old indulgences, or a fresh exercise of paternal responsibility, but by sympathetic 'leadership.' The days of local patronage are played out, and if any man wishes to 'look after' those around him, he must begin by 'looking forward.' He must be something more than a 'pump.' If he is merely willing to be 'used,' instead of being 'useful,' there is no fear, indeed, that his services will not be recognised; but they will be those of a tool rather than of a workman. No one denies the usefulness of a tool. Nevertheless, when we ask who are the useful 'people' in a generation, we look for something in them more than passive utility. They do not merely supply material for the discontented and ambitious to work upon or employ, but are leaders in giving shape to social desires and growth. All, indeed, cannot be these. The multitude must needs be led, and the value of what they say and do depends upon their being led right. Surely, then, the most 'useful' are those who best teach others what to think, and enable them best to realise that which they desire to be done for them, or to do themselves,

IN A CARAVAN.

'Which means, I think, that go or stay
Affects you nothing, either way.'

'AND that is where Parker sleeps.'

We craned our necks, and, stooping low, saw beneath the vehicle a parasitic square box like a huge barnacle fixed to the bottom of the van. A box about four feet by two. The door of it was open, and Parker's bedfellows—two iron buckets and a sack of potatoes—stood confessed.

'Oh, yes—very nice,' we murmured.

'Oh ! it's awfully jolly,' said the host-in-himself.

We looked at Parker, who was peeling potatoes on the off-shaft—Parker, six feet two, with a soldier's bearing—and we drifted off into thought.

'And who drives ?' we asked, with an intelligent interest.

'Oh, Parker. And we do all the rest, you know.'

It was seven o'clock in the evening when we joined the caravan, in a stackyard on the outskirts of an Eastern county town.

'That's 'im—that's Lord George Sanger,' was said of the writer by one of the crowd of small boys assembled at the stack-yard gate. A travelling menagerie and circus was advertised in a somewhat 'voyant' manner on the town walls, and a fancied resemblance to the aristocratic manager thereof accredited us with an honourable connection in the enterprise.

'When do you open ?' inquired an intelligent spectator—anxious to show *savoir faire*.

'See small handbills,' replied the host-in-himself, with equal courtesy.

'Oo are yer, at any rate ?' inquired an enlightened voter.

'Who are *you* ?' we replied with spirit ; and, passing through the gate, we closed it to keep out the draught. Then we paid a domiciliary visit, and were duly shown Parker's apartments.

In outward appearance the caravan suggested an overgrown bathing-machine. The interior resembled the cabin of a yacht. The walls were gaily decorated with painting on the panels ; flowers bloomed in vases fixed upon the wall ; two prettily

curtained windows—one a bay, the other flat—gave a view of the surrounding country. At the forward end, against the bulkhead, so to speak, was a small but enterprising chest of drawers, and above it a large looking-glass which folded down, developed legs, and owned to the soft impeachment of being a bed. Beneath the starboard window a low and capacious sofa, combining the capacity of a locker. Under the port window was fixed a table against the bulkhead, where four people could and did dine sumptuously. When *en voyage* and between meals, charts, maps, and literature littered this table pleasantly. A ship's clock hung over it, and a corner cupboard did its duty in the port quarter. A heavy plush curtain closed off the kitchen and pantry, which were roomy and of marvellous capacity. Then the back door—in halves—and the back steps, brass-bound, treacherous.

In front there was a little verandah with supporting columns of bamboo. Here we usually sat when travelling—Parker in the right-hand corner handling the ribbons of the tandem cart-horses with skill and discretion.

As dinner was not ready, we proceeded to pitch the small tent wherein the two men were to sleep. It was a singular tent, with a vast number of pendent ropes which became entangled at the outset. We began with zeal, but presently left the ropes and turned our attention to the pegs. These required driving in with a wooden mallet and a correct eye. Persons unaccustomed to such work strike the peg on one side—the mallet goes off at a tangent and strikes the striker with force upon the shin-bone.

Finally Parker said he would put up the tent ‘by'n-by.’

There was a Bedlington terrier—Parker's dog—attached (literally) to the caravan. He was tied to one of the bamboo columns on the forecastle, and when Parker absented himself for long he usually leaped off the platform and sought death by strangulation—this we discovered later. When we abandoned the tent we thought we would cheer up the dog.

‘Don't touch him, sir ; he'll bite you,’ said Parker.

Of course we touched him ; no man who respects himself at all is ready to admit that a dog bites *him*. It was wonderful how that dog and Parker understood each other. But the bite was not serious.

At last dinner was ready, and we are prepared to take any horrid oath required that no professional cook could set before a king potatoes more mealy. This only, of all the items in the

menu, is mentioned, because where potatoes are good the experienced know that other things will never be amiss.

We waited on ourselves, and placed the dirty dishes, plates, and forks upon the back step, where Parker replaced them in a few minutes, clean.

'Oh !' exclaimed the hostess-in-herself, about ten p.m., when we were smoking the beatific pipe, 'By the way—Parker's dinner !'

In response to united shouts Parker appeared, and learned with apparent surprise that he had omitted to dine. He looked pale and worn, and told us that he had been blowing out the air-beds. At eleven o'clock we two men left the ladies and went out into the cold moonlight, where our tent looked remarkably picturesque. Of course we fell over a tent-peg each, and the host lost his watch-key. Parker came forward—dining—to explain where the ropes were, and fell over one himself, losing a piece of cold boiled beef in the grass. We hunted for it with a lucifer match. Its value was enhanced by the knowledge that when the bed was shut down and had developed its legs the larder was inaccessible. After some time Parker discovered that the dog had been let loose and had found the beef some moments before. He explained that it was a singular dog and preferred to live by dishonesty. Unstolen victuals had for him no zest. He added that the loss was of no consequence, as he never had been very keen on that piece of beef. We finally retired into the tent, and left Parker still at work completing several contracts he had undertaken to carry through 'by'n-by.' He said he preferred doing them over-night, as it was no good getting up *before* five on these dark autumnal mornings.

As an interior the tent was a decided success. We went inside and hooked the flap laboriously from top to bottom. Then we remembered that the host's pyjamas were outside. He undid two hooks only and attempted to effect a *soutie* through the resultant interstice. He stuck. The position was undignified and conducive to weak and futile laughter. At last Parker had to leave the washing-up of the saucepans to come to the rescue, while the dog barked and imagined that he was attending a burglary.

It was nearly midnight before we made our first acquaintance with an air-bed, and it took us until seven o'clock the next morning to get on to speaking terms with it. The air-bed, like the Bedlington terrier, must be approached with caution. Its manner is, to say the least of it, repellent. Unless the sleeper (save the

mark !) lies geometrically in the centre, the air rushes to one side and the ignorant roll off the other. If there were no bedclothes one could turn round easily, but the least movement throws the untucked blanket incontinently into space, while the instability of the bed precludes tucking in. Except for these and a few other drawbacks, the air-bed may safely be recommended.

The next morning showed a white frost on the grass, and washing in the open, in water that had stood all night in a bucket, was, to say the least of it, invigorating. Parker browned our boots, put a special edge of his own upon our razors, attended to the horses, oiled the wheels, fetched the milk, filled the lamps of the paraffin stove, bought a gallon of oil, and carried a can of water from a neighbouring farm before breakfast, just by way—he explained—of getting ready to start his day's work.

An early start had been projected, but owing to the fact that after breakfast Parker had to beat the carpet, wash the dishes, plates, cups and saucers, knives and forks, and his own face, strike the tent, let the air out of the air-beds, roll up the water-proof sheets, clean the saucepans, groom the horses, ship the shafts, send off a parcel from the station, buy two loaves of bread, and thank the owner of the stackyard—owing, I say, to the fact that Parker had these things to accomplish while we ‘did the rest,’ it was eleven o'clock before all hands were summoned to get ‘her’ out of the narrow gateway. This was safely accomplished, by Parker, while we walked round, looked knowingly at the wheels, sternly at the gate-posts, and covertly at the spectators.

Then we clambered up, the host-in-himself cracked the whip, Parker gathered up his reins.

‘Come up, Squire! Come up, Nancy!’

And the joy of the caravaneer was ours.

This joy is not like the joy of other men. For the high-road, the hedgerows, the birds, the changing sky, the ever-varying landscape, belong to the caravaneer. He sits in his moving home and is saturated with the freedom of the gipsy without the haunting memory of the police, which sits like Care on the roof of the gipsy van. Book on lap, he luxuriates on the forecastle when the sun shines and the breeze blows soft, noting idly the passing beauty of the scene, returning peaceably to the printed page. When rain comes, as it sometimes does in an English summer, he goes inside and gives a deeper attention to the book, while Parker drives and gets wet. Getting wet is one of Parker's duties. And

through rain and sunshine he moves on ever, through the peaceful and never dull—the incomparable beauty of an English pastoral land. The journey is accomplished without fatigue, without anxiety; for the end of it can only be the quiet corner of a moor, or some sleepy meadow. Speed is of no account—distance immaterial. The caravaneer looks down with indifference upon the dense curiosity of the smaller towns; the larger cities he wisely avoids.

The writer occupied the humble post of brakesman—elected thereto in all humility by an overpowering majority. The duties are heavy, the glory small. A clumsy vehicle like a caravan can hardly venture down the slightest incline without a skid under the wheel and a chain round the spoke. This necessitates the frequent handling of a heavy piece of iron, which is black and greasy at the top of a hill and red-hot at the bottom.

A steep hill through the town dispelled the Lord George Sanger illusion at one fell blow, the rustic-urban mind being incapable of conceiving that that self-named nobleman could demean himself to the laying of the skid.

Of the days that followed there remains the memory of pleasant sunny days and cool evenings, of the partridge plucked and cleaned by the roadside, fried deliciously over the paraffin flame, amidst fresh butter and mushrooms with the dew still on them. We look back with pleasure to the quiet camp in a gravel-pit on a hill-top far from the haunts of men—to the pitching of the tent by moonlight in a meadow where the mushrooms gleamed like snow, to be duly gathered for the frying-pan next morning by the host-in-himself and in pyjamas. Nor are the sterner sides of caravan life to be forgotten—the calamity at the brow of a steep hill, where a nasty turn made the steady old wheeler for once lose his head and his legs; the hard-fought battle over a half-side of bacon between the Bedlington terrier and the writer when that mistaken dog showed a marked preference for the stolen Wiltshire over the partridge bone of charity.

And there are pleasant recollections of friends made, and, alas! lost so soon; of the merry evening in a country house, of which the hospitable host in his capacity of justice of the peace gave us short shrift in the choice between the county gaol and his hospitality. Unless we consented to sleep beneath his roof and eat his salt, he vowed he would commit us for vagabonds without visible means of support. We chose the humiliation of a good dinner and

a sheeted bed. The same open-handed squire hung partridges in our larder, and came with us on the forecastle to pilot us through his own intricate parish next day.

Also came the last camp and the last dinner, at which the writer distinguished himself, and the host-in-himself was at last allowed to manipulate (with accompanying lecture) a marvellous bivouac-tin containing a compound called beef *à la mode*, which came provided with its own spirits of wine and wick, both of which proved ineffectual to raise the temperature of the beef above a mediocre tepidity. Parker, having heard that the remains of this toothsome dish were intended for his breakfast, wisely hid it with such care that the dog stole it and consumed it, with results which cannot be dwelt upon here.

Of the vicissitudes of road travel we recollect but little. The incipient sea-sickness endured during the first day has now lost its sting ; the little differences about the relative virtues of devilled partridge and beef *à la mode* are forgotten, and only the complete novelty, the heedless happiness of it all remains. We did not even know the day of the week or the date ; which ignorance, my masters, has a wealth of meaning nowadays.

“ Date—oh, ask Parker ! ” we would say.

And Parker always knew.

TO A SIGN-PAINTER.

O WORTHY artist, in my chair
 I sat, and watched you working there,
 A humble slave of art,
 Upon the board which bears the sign
 I saw you painting, line by line,
 In hues astonishingly fine,
 That marvellous White Hart.

How gleaming white the creature shone,
 How green the grass he stood upon,
 When all was quite complete !
 Observe the posture of the head,
 The eye (a lurid spot of red),
 The strange extremities, instead
 Of ordinary feet !

You vanished at your labour's close,
 Since other landlords, I suppose,
 For your assistance ask ;
 A Ship—a military scene—
 A Lion red—a Dragon green—
 The Sun and Moon, with stars between—
 What is your present task ?

What though perspective you ignore,
 What though the paints you keep in store
 Are bad as bad can be ?
 Impressionists would doubtless glance
 Upon your masterpiece askance,
 But yet their scorn is not, perchance,
 From envy wholly free.

TO A SIGN-PAINTER.

An artist in a humble sphere,
Of carping cliques you have no fear,
 No dread of critic's tongue.
Contented with the rustics' praise,
No base committee of R.A.'s
Avails to rob you of your bays —
 Your works are always hung !

No thought of unavailing quest
For purchasers disturbs your rest,
 No fear of payment late ;
Your work is scarcely finished when
You take the money, there and then—
A system which more famous men
 Would gladly imitate !

FOREST TITHES.

BY A SON OF THE MARSHES.

THE leaves are falling fast, for a spell of wet weather has been followed by frosty nights, though the days are bright and warm still, and the mellow autumnal tints glow in the sunshine.

At the farm, which is perched on the highest point of the moor, not a sound is to be heard, the menfolk being all at work in the fields. The farmstead is in good order, old though it is, for its stone walls were solidly built, they are thick, and all the timber used was oak, well seasoned. So substantial was the work that, with the exception of a few necessary repairs about some of the outbuildings, all is in nearly the same condition in which it was left by the owners, long dead, who caused it to be built so many generations ago. The land also is to all appearance just what it was when the site of the farm was chosen. What was suited for cultivation was planted then and the rest left wild, as it still remains, close to the solid path or track that leads from the woods up to the farm ; and halfway up the rush-grown hillside is a bog into which it would be a sorry business to stray. Cattle avoid it by instinct ; no hoof-prints are ever seen round that soft place.

Never a moor without its trout stream, or streams, which flow at its foot, cutting sharp runs where, in the course of years, all the earthy matter has been washed away, leaving at last a bottom of clean sharp sand and bright washed stones. You can hear the swirl and the splash where it runs through the copse-growth of the moor side and see the glistening of the pure bright water where it turns into the meadows as it continually pursues its course from the hills and moors above, down to the moors below ; hidden here and there by thorns and brambles, giant 'hexes,' thistles, ferns, and all the other growth common to wild lands.

Rustic bridges, the brickwork of which is as old as the stonework of the farm buildings, carry the cart tracks from one meadow—if land such as this can be dignified by that name—to another. Where they have fallen into decay and tumbled into the stream many years ago—for mosses cover all the brickwork, over which the water ripples, forming miniature cascades—thick planks have

been placed, and turf on the top of them. And as in the course of time the cattle passing and repassing, to say nothing of the carts, have worn the turf covering thin, more has been added, and tough heather tangle worked in with it; until at last a good solid crust has been formed above the stout, rough oak planks which is nearly a foot in thickness. As a rule the water is only a few inches deep in the middle; but where it has cut its way under the roots of the trees that line its course from its source up in the hill moors to its final delivery into the river Mole, it is deeper. If you probe with a stick under those roots you will know just where the trout rush to when they are frightened. At this time of the year they do get frightened, and more than that, killed; for it is their spawning time; or, as the dwellers on the moor put it, ‘the trout are running up;’ and the herons are about, taking their moorland tithe, which they will have, try to stop them who will.

For a whole week I have been watching five particular herons busy in most systematic fashion; and also the trout. If you go to work very quietly, you may watch fish, but it is only learned by much practice and experience. A footfall or a shadow will be enough to clear the stream, or at least that part of it which you wish to examine, in a flash.

So we slip down the side of the hedge that leads down to one of the old bridges—they might equally well be called culverts; and before reaching it we crawl on our hands and knees to look through a small opening there is between the hedge and the brickwork. The sunshine being warm and bright, the trout are working on the clean sharp gravel, winding and rooting about like eels. Not large fish—they never are that in the upper parts of these quick hill streams; the largest of them is only a small herring size, the very thing for our herons. Scotch firs, of a fine growth, are numerous along the run of the stream; single trees, and again clumps of smaller ones. Some of the larger ones are sadly torn by the fierce blasts that sweep over the moors in winter. In the firs, when the trout run up, one may look for the heron, one of the keenest and most sagacious of birds. Many a time has he outwitted and outschemed me in the days of my youth, and I have always admired and respected him accordingly. I would fain write a whole book about the heron alone—percher, as well as swimmer and wader, is he. From what I have seen of him in the trees, he is as much at home in them as is a blackbird

or a thrush, and his movements are far more graceful, notwithstanding his form and size ; for the bird drops, glides and walks about the trees as noiselessly as a grey and white shadow. On the very topmost shoots of a fir that can afford him a foothold he will perch, and sit there for twenty minutes, and more, at a time. A few days ago I watched one do this from a place of ambush, which was, like most of those suitable for the purpose, anything but a pleasant one, being a large clump of blackthorns and brambles, in the midst of which I lay hidden. He was not, however, allowed to enjoy his elevated point of survey in peace, for missel-thrushes, blackbirds and song thrushes, aided by finches, dashed at him, until the long neck and bill went darting and striking out like a silvery snake in all directions as the birds flew at him. Then he was left unmolested, and away they flew to cover screaming and chirping their loudest.

From my lowly position I had examined some firs that were close to the edge of the stream, thinking herons might be in them, but had failed to discover any. They were there, however, and directly I rose to my feet, almost over my head floated two of these birds, coming out of the very trees I had watched closely, glasses in hand. The heron's positions fall in with chance projections and broken limbs so well—he perches in fir trees by preference—that it is impossible to detect him before he has caught sight of oneself. I put one up recently, and directly in front of me ; the bird was standing close to the edge of water overshadowed by some large alders ; the grey mud below being plentifully sprinkled with large open dead shells of the fresh-water mussels. So well did the heron's plumage agree with its environment that, until it moved right before me, I had not seen it. Until then it had only shown a bit of white, like the glitter of the inside portions of the mussel shells that lay gaping on the mud beneath it.

Owls, also, in their plumage mimic and fall in with the tones of their natural surroundings, to a degree past the belief of those who have not patiently watched them in their own haunts.

And often the most patient and constant watching is unattended with success. Early and late had I been abroad of late, and had come home quite disheartened with failure, and then I succeeded in my quest owing to my coming unexpectedly on a large, partially drained moorland fish pond whilst in search of an artist friend of mine who, as I had been told, was painting in that

direction. After stumbling on bits that were enough to drive a would-be artist wild, through my fieldglass I discovered him settled right out in the most treacherous part of the moor. Not without much cautious travelling did I reach him. Whatever possessed him to go and paint in one of the worst moor swamps of the district? I asked. 'To get a faithful study of the moor mosses, sulphur yellow and rich dark brown, with the rush clumps scattered about over it,' was his reply. This was his foreground; in the distance he had two cottages, and beyond were the fir woods.

On his feet were huge wooden sabots lashed tightly to his leather boots. These, he informed me, were made by himself—sepulchral-looking articles they were. He had placed four coats of black paint on them, he said, both inside and out. Any way, they answered his purpose admirably, for although the water had been flowing under his feet beneath the moss all the day, no damp had reached him; and the result on his canvas was all that could be desired. To my request that he would favour me with a dance in those coffin-like damp-protectors before I left him, he replied that it would hardly be wise to dance about much, for only a few days previously a couple of cows had got bogged just below the very spot on which we were, and had the farmer's men not pulled them out with ropes they must have been smothered.

To return to my moorland fish-pond, the sight of five herons sailing in wide circles over any spot would be sufficient to attract the notice of any naturalist. The birds were shouting hoarsely to each other after the fashion of rooks, but far more noisily, just out of gun shot, but within capital distance for a rook rifle. My appearance in the open did not cause the slightest difference in their movements, they kept passing over me in their wide circles, which was quite contrary to their usual cautious method of movement. On diving into the deep hollow of the moor I discovered the cause of this. A sluice at the further end of the pond had rotted and given way, letting great quantities of fish down into the moor stream, to the great joy of all the prowlers in the district, both furred and feathered, particularly of the herons. And the foresters, noting the birds at work in the stream, profited by the sight, and had fine fish also, for the mere picking of them up out of the water, which was too shallow, now that the stream had gone down, to cover them.

When the herons found that the stream was not safe for them,

they confined their fishing to the centre of the water that remained in the large pond, where they were in no danger, and where their finny prey seemed literally ready to jump into their mouths; for the large fish, pike, perch, trout and eels, all of them that remained there, chased the smaller fry continually. So eager were they, that the shallow edges were all on the ripple with small fish that had rushed thither, where those that fed on them could not follow them. But even this did not completely frustrate the murderous intentions of the bigger fish, for some of the pike rushed on to the mud and perished there, being unable to get out of the ooze. This accident had brought the herons to the spot in force. The immediate reason of their hoarse cries and their circling flights at the time I came up was soon explained. Two men were repairing the broken sluice gate at the further end of the pond, and although the birds might have settled and fed to their hearts' content, they would not do it whilst the workmen were there.

The sluice pond job is finished, but the pond is still very low; it will take a long time to fill up the large space again, even though it is supplied by a trout stream. So the herons—more have come since the first ones prospected and returned a favourable report in their own bird fashion—have it all their own way there. They range the edges of the shallow pools as well as the main current in the centre, and when satisfied to the full they rest in the trees near, where, I am happy to say, they have not been fired at. A few gentlemen who rent these moorland districts for the rough shooting they can get in them, have given instructions that the herons shall be left undisturbed—a very wise precaution, for the diet of these birds is a varied one, and some of the creatures that have their habitat where the heron hunts for his living are far too numerous.

As long as the moors remain there never will be any lack of trout in its streams, yet even those who have the right to fish there do not always get them. After all, a shillings' worth of fresh herrings would, in my opinion, surpass even a fortunate catch of such small fish, and it seems a pity that so many of the little spotted beauties should have to go to make an ordinary 'fry,' as they term it. However, there is no perceptible falling off; others come to take the places of those that get caught; and happily, many who have the privilege of fishing, not only do not use it much themselves, but they take very good care that some who have

not that right, yet could very well dispose of the fish, or feed themselves and their children with it, do not get the chance. When the moon shines our herons do not let much escape their sharp eyes and bills.

Calm and beautiful as the moor farms look in the summer and autumn, surrounded also by the loveliest woodland scenery in England, in the long winter time they look the picture of dreariness; the snow frequently drifts up about them so as to shut them out from the rest of the world. In the lanes it is shoulder high where it has been blown by the fierce gusts of howling winds that sweep over the uplands. A fortnight of such weather as this brings the wild creatures close up to human dwellings, and particularly to these lonely farmsteads. When the light shows red through the window casements, before the stout shutters are pinned up for the night, is the signal for the fox to come and see if he can pick up a supper somehow. It will be through no fault of his if he fails in this, if there is anything about that he can kill and eat, from a turkey down to a poor starved blackbird, or from a hare to a mouse. I have seen some grey dog foxes that I should not like to be shut up in a small room with, if I had nothing but a stick in my hands. A hard fighter is Reynard, when cornered; he snaps like a wolf and is active as a cat. He makes short work of anything he can capture. Domestic fowls have, some of them, an aggravating way of preferring to roost, like pheasants, in the trees at night, and to make their nests away out in the moorland or under the trailing plants and bushes. That jubilant cackle, however, which the successful hen cannot control herself sufficiently to repress, after she has had the cunning to hide away in her nesting place, betrays her to other creatures besides her lawful owners. She may even have been prudent enough to wander a little way from her eggs before she commits herself to it; but the fox knows the meaning of the cry and profits by it. Although, as a rule, he prowls about in the night time, when his cubs begin to eat flesh and are hungry, he is not particular as to the hour, provided the locality be a lonely one. I have known the hen's jubilant voice stopped abruptly, and on going to the spot whence it had sounded have found a few feathers and the marks of a hurried scuffle, but no fowl.

During one bitter winter I was, in the pursuit of my calling, located in the heart of the moorlands, where my home for the

time was in the cottage of a hearty old couple. After supper the three of us were wont to occupy the old-fashioned chimney settles—‘Father’ and ‘Mother’ on one side of the fireplace, and I on the other. I happened to say that I had overheard some men complaining that they had tracked a fox, and found a couple of their fowls buried.

‘Ah!’ said the old man, as he puffed slowly at his pipe, and patted the red-hot ash with his finger, ‘I killed a fox for that werry self-same thing; but,’ he added, almost in a whisper, ‘nobody knowed on it. You ’members it, mother.’

‘Massy, oh!’ rejoined she, ‘I wouldn’t hev sich another set out as that ’ere fur all the spring chicken as iver wus hatched. I wus feared the Squire wud ha’ got hold on’t. A good master he wus, but he showed no marcy to any that hed killed a fox on his grounds, an’ they run middlin’ wide.’

‘Mother kep’ her fowls for market,’ resumed the old man, ‘they paid middlin’, most special in airy spring time; ’t was jest sich a winter as this ’ere, an’ some o’ them fowls went. She was ‘mazin’ vexed, for they kep’ on goin’. I knowed ’twas a fox, but didn’t let on tu mother, on’y one mornin’ she seed him cum slippin’ roun’ on the snow. Thet did it. When I come home to supper that same night she looks me most oncommon straight in the face, an’ she says, “Kill that ’ere *thing*, father, or ’twill ruin us.” She was middlin’ spirity that time o’ day, I ken tell ye, an’ I knowed she meant what she said. Well, to cut it short, I got one o’ mother’s oldest hens, an’ fixed her up so as the fox could see her, in an empy pigstye. Right in front o’ the old hen, about a foot away, wus a trap, a real good un.. We went to bed and in the middle o’ the night we wus ‘woke by the most desprit row. “Father,” sez mother, “you’ve ketched that ’ere varmint o’ a fox. Git up, an’ take a prong wi’ yer.” (A prong is local for *pitch-fork*.)

‘Up I gets, lights my lantern, takes the prong, an’ goes out. Massy, oh! the old hen wus hollering like mad, an’ the fox wus bangin’ about in that ’ere trap, the way he flew about an’ bit wus a sight to see. I settled un with the prong, an’ the old hen too, to stop her hollerin’; an’ I buried the pair on ’em, in one hole, a goodish bit away from the house; but ’twas a long time afore we felt easy like; fur ’twas a most menjous row to be heerd in the dead o’ the night, ef anybody hed bin about they must ha’ heerd it.’

If very stringent measures had not been taken for his preservation, the fox would have long ago shared the fate of others of our wild creatures more virtuous but less fortunate than himself. Fox hunters to the manor born have, of course, their own views on the matter, and these are very properly universally respected. Besides this, it is not pleasant for some others belonging to a certain class who have struggled up into Society—with a big S—and wish to keep there, to be cut dead because they have given their keepers orders to kill foxes. So Master Reynard goes on taking his tithes, especially when he has got cubs, for whom it is his duty to provide. And his foragings round the lonely moor farms are not by any means a dead loss to those who suffer from his depredations. If complaint is made in the right quarters, compensation is generally most cheerfully given. Yet I have known some unhappy souls grunt even after they had received more pay than the case demanded. It is a hard thing to please folks. A fox, dog or vixen, never comes near man, woman or child if he can help it; but if hemmed in, he would be as dangerous as a collie dog is under the same circumstances.

At the foot of one of the South Down hills, where there is a long strip of coarse grass and moss, a quarter of a yard wide and over a mile long, there is one of the abiding places of the badger—one well known to me. The land was once broken up by the plough, but this proved useless labour and expense, and now it is a paradise for wild creatures. That prince of British butterflies, the purple emperor, floats and dashes over this bit of moorland valley, crossing from one belt of oaks to another. The moss bee and the humble bee have their homes in the mossy surface, and our old friend, in his grey, black, and white coat, scratches them out with his claws, or roots them up with his nose like a pig. In some of the moor districts he has been wiped out, and much it is to be regretted that those who have had the power to prevent this had not also the knowledge and the disposition to do it. One by one our wild animals and birds are dwindling down as to numbers; not shot or trapped on account of any real harm they may do, but for the money the creatures fetch, dead or living. One hears in all directions of the harm done by rabbits, although the Ground Game Act has been passed. What can be expected when the creatures that were there to keep the pin-wire vermin in check are killed? Besides which these are bred in vast numbers expressly for the markets.

Our vermin-killers—polecats, stoats, and weasels—have been captured and bought in wholesale numbers, in order that they may be exported to some of our colonies to kill the rabbits which were formerly introduced there by mischievous bunglers, and now prove a curse to the land. Change of climate and habitat alters the habits of creatures that are not indigenous. It will be found that polecats, stoats, and weasels will turn out another curse; instead of killing off the rabbits, they will certainly prove an inveterate foe to poultry and to the small animals that are native to the soil. I speak feelingly on this subject, as one whose opinion on the matter has been often asked and freely given, yet never followed. This acclimatising question is a most unsettled one, but it will have to be studied, to spare much future trouble to us and our colonies. Soon we shall be cursed with a plague of rats and mice that will not easily be kept under.

Man considers himself the lord of creation, as well as of the soil he buys or inherits, but some of the changes he brings about are to my mind matter for great regret. Quite recently I have seen pheasants take the place of black game in one district I know. Only a few of the latter lingered there, the remnant of a once fairly numerous family, real natives of the moors, not imported birds; but they are gone now. Where they once fed about the rush clumps, on the rush seeds, a keeper's cottage now stands, with dog kennels attached. Instead of one's flushing a blackcock one sees a pheasant spring up, and the croon and play of the former has given place to the drum and challenge of the latter. And two years ago I saw preparations made on a secluded side of the moor to turn the locality, where only wild ducks, woodcocks, snipe, and blackgame had had their habitats, into a cover for pheasants. The job is now completed and it will answer its purpose to perfection, but the alterations have certainly taken away some of the beauties of that wild hillside.

To return, however, to our moorland tithe-takers. The polecat, who used to be one of the chief of these, is now almost a thing of the past, and when he is seen or captured the circumstance is made a note of. Like the rest of his species, this very powerful, and in his own domain most useful, little creature carries his prey like a retriever. From the polecat to the weasel the strength of the family is something remarkable. It is a wonderful sight to see one of them come bounding along, holding a prey as large and as heavy as itself off the ground by the middle of the back. A

few days ago, a friend of mine—a keen observer of wild life, the result of whose observations will, I trust, ere long come before the public—saw what he took to be a lump of dry hedgerow plums blown up by the wind over a green ride towards him. As it came nearer, it proved to be some creature bounding along bearing a half-grown rat, and, when within a yard or so of the spot where he stood, the rat was dropped on the turf and a weasel looked at him as only a weasel can look. The animal was only aware of the proximity of a human when he got wind of my friend, in fact the rat he carried before him prevented the weasel from seeing what was directly in front of him. The man lifted the rat, noted the way in which it had been killed, and then placed it where the weasel had dropped it, so that the latter might fetch it after he had gone.

Rats do not of course frequent waste lands, since there would be nothing for them to feed on there; but most of the cottagers who live on commons keep pigs and fowls. From one of these homesteads the rat was being carried to a wood-stack, where it could be consumed in peace. Determined foes to rats and mice are the weasels, also to frogs and some other small deer, and for doing man this good service he kills or exports them where they are not wanted. It is true that stoats and weasels kill rabbits, but for one rabbit they will kill forty rats and mice. I only wish the whole of the family were more numerous! Five years ago we had a great plague of mice in the woodland districts. The pests invaded the gardens of those who had large houses near the woods, cut down the flowers in the borders and dragged them into their holes, and nibbled the wall fruit. In fact the folks had to cast about to find measures for their destruction. When things were at their worst, weasels made their appearance, whole families of weasels, just as the short-eared owls suddenly appeared during the more recent plague of voles on the southern uplands of Scotland in large numbers. These owls have also remained and bred in the district, to the great relief of the land. It is to be hoped they will be unmolested and their usefulness universally recognised. Sir Herbert Maxwell has used his local influence, I believe, to this end.

The weasels were noticed all making their way to the parts where the mice were gathered. Then the mice shifted their quarters, but the weasels followed. Two or three families, the old ones and their half-grown kittens, will soon move mice where they

are about. Four or five ferocious old grey rats will kill more poultry—of all kinds—and steal more eggs than all the weasel family in a district.

Anyone walking on the roads that are only separated from the cornfields by low hedges in our outlying country districts, in the dusk of the evening, after the corn has been carried, can see some very pretty hunting; for then the rats come to the fields and live for a time in the hedgerows. If you go very quietly and look over one of the field-gates, you will see dusky, bunched-up forms some eight or ten yards from the hedge; rats these are, feeding on the scattered grain. Presently they go loping up and down, with their peculiar gait, making for the cover of the hedge. There was nothing apparently in the field to have alarmed them, so we look upwards and see at once what it was that caused them to seek the cover of that hedge bottom. Two brown owls are beating over the field in quest of rats or mice, no matter which; the first that can be got at lives but a very few moments, after it is gripped and bitten through the back of the neck. Their hunt, this beat, has been useless; they flit over the adjacent fir-trees and for a time become invisible to us. One by one, by threes and twos, out come the rats again; the owls are not overhead, so some venture out a longer distance from the hedge. Presently we hear a rare scamper and some squeaking, for the owls have changed their tactics. They have come down the side of the hedge this time, and flapped again into the fir-woods, each with a rat in his grip. A very fortunate matter it is for the owls that no one in a velveteen jacket and carrying a double-barrelled gun is at hand, or their spadeagled forms might have ornamented the gable end of a dog-kennel next morning. One of these gentlemen, to whom I lately appealed for their protection, replied, ‘I ain’t *sin’ em* do what some says they will do; but I kills ‘em when I has the chance, to keep ‘em from doin’ of it.’

When will things be set right in these directions? I often wonder. I have seen the inside of wheat-stacks eaten out, befouled and ruined by rats and mice; and still owls are killed and farm-labourers are rewarded for killing stoats and weasels. A faggot-stack, also, I have known half pulled to pieces, to get at a poor little mouse-killing weasel that had taken refuge there from its pursuers.

Even that glorious insect-destroyer, the great green dragon-fly, that helps to clear country lanes of such winged pests as hornets,

wasps, and the ferocious stoat-flies—‘stouts’—has evil properties attributed to it by the rustics. I have seen country children—and, indeed, grown-up people—show far more fear at the sight of that swift-winged beauty than they would at hornets or a wasps’ nest. ‘Them ’ere things is adder-spears, an’ it ain’t safe tu meddle wi’ em.’ This superstitious belief, in fact, saves the grand insect from being killed. It is a very rare thing to see a dragon-fly captured in country places. The farmers’ lads also call the great dragon-fly the hoss-stinger. Just a word of advice to those who have delicate fingers: this fine fly, if held incautiously, can and will bite pretty severely. So will the very large and handsome garden spiders which weave their wonderfully geometrical webs, suspended from twigs and lashed to branches, in the latter part of the autumn. A colony of very fine ones have located themselves in some box-trees close to my back door. The number of insects they capture in their nets is something wonderful, particularly large bluebottle flies. They do not get all they capture though; for wasps come and take the bluebottles out of the web piecemeal—the head goes first, and the body is left for a second journey. Full well do the spiders know the difference in the sound of the hum of a fly’s wing and that of a wasp. When the latter comes to rob their webs they do not show themselves; but directly a bluebottle gets meshed, they make a tiger-like rush for it.

The hedgehog, urchin or hedge-pig of Shakespeare, is very little understood so far as his habits are concerned. I have seen some recent statements in various papers to the effect that hedgehogs will kill young fowls, as if this were a new fact for the edification of their readers. Not only will they kill the young ones, but the old ones are not safe from them, if in a coop. The foot of Master Hedgehog is sure to be put in or on it if he gets the chance. I have even seen our friend described as ‘our poor little persecuted English porcupine.’ That he can never be, for his habits are nocturnal and no one considers him worth looking after, unless it be a gipsy who has a taste for baked hedge-pig. He is not so harmless, however, as some other creatures. A very large hedgehog is quite capable of killing a wild rabbit. He can depress his spine and squeeze through places one would have supposed too narrow for him.

The distance this nimble creature can travel over is quite remarkable. Out in his own domain, the woods and the fields,

he is perfectly harmless. Some hedgerows are frequented by numbers of them. There they lie curled up among the dead leaves in the daytime. In other hedges you may search for them in vain. All would go well if the bristly little animal would keep his own place. But he will not do this. He sniffs until he finds something to his liking, to which he applies himself with pig-like determination. Sometimes this happens to be a trap baited with portions of rabbit's flesh, where he gets caught and whines most pitifully.

But sometimes, when the farmer's wife goes to look at the coop out on the grass in front of the house, she finds her chicks killed and eaten, and their mother bitten and nearly dead with fright, the sole cause of the mischief being a great hedgehog, which is trying to get out of the coop, not so easy a matter now that his stomach is full of chicken as it was for him to creep through when empty. In such a case he is usually promptly settled by the points of a bright hayfork.

But, after all, when the matter is fairly considered without prejudice, the amount of tithe taken by the wild creatures of the moorlands is very small. The creatures that are able to do much mischief are now very few in numbers. As to the birds, the moors are not their favourite dwelling-places—at least, not of our common birds, which keep to the line of cultivated lands. You will see trees laden with fruit in the cottage gardens, placed in spots few and far between on the moor; cottage and garden in its own small enclosure. The jays may squawk in the cover round about these, but they let the fruit alone, for they would have to cross a considerable open space from any given quarter to reach the fruit. On the whole, considering all the devices employed by man to circumvent these tithe takers, it shows great sagacity on their part that they are able to get as much from him, or his, as they do.

THE COUNTESS RADNA.

BY W. E. NORRIS,

AUTHOR OF 'MATRIMONY,' 'HEAPS OF MONEY,' ETC.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

LOVE TURNS SOUR.

THE Marchese di Leonforte was a humbled and saddened man as he walked away from Clarges Street towards the hotel in which he had taken up his temporary abode. He had arrived at a tolerably clear comprehension of the state of affairs, and that was, so far, satisfactory ; yet he was painfully conscious of having failed altogether to carry out his original purpose, which was not satisfactory at all. To avenge an insulted, injured and adorable lady ought to have been so simple ! But what are you to do when inexorable and irrational custom snatches your weapons out of your hands ? As he said to himself, addressing an imaginary controversialist, '*Che vuole ?* The times are bad ; but they are what they are, and we live in them. The old remedies were the best ; only it appears that they are obsolete, and we have no choice but to utilise the new ones. For the rest, I do not blame this cold-blooded Englishman, whose only fault is his insensibility ; and that he cannot help. He has his excuses—I do not deny them—but, *per Dio !* if she required excuses, she would have hers. What does it all come to ? That he is united to a woman whom he is incapable of appreciating, and who must, at all hazards, be released from him. How ? You are wanting in intelligence if you put such a question, considering that we are now near the end of the nineteenth century. I do not like it ; I do not pretend to think it moral or noble or even decent ; but I venture to remind you that it is not I who have made society what it is, nor I who chose the date of my birth.'

Not a few of the pedestrians in Piccadilly turned round to stare at the tall, black-browed foreigner who strode past them, accompanying these muttered self-communings with appropriate gestures. But he heeded neither their curiosity nor their smiles, being in imagination very far away from the streets of London at the time.

It was not that endless prospect of stunted red-brick buildings and wood pavements and omnibuses and hansom cabs that his dreaming eyes saw, but the sun-baked hills of Sicily, with their white towns and villages perched upon the heights, their orange and lemon groves nestling in sheltered valleys, and the snow and fire of Etna towering above them against a melting blue sky. Sicily is to all intents and purposes as remote from the world as Central Africa ; two people who loved each other and found one another's society all-sufficient might well be happy together in its lovely scenery and divine climate, despising sneers and censures to which their ears would necessarily be closed. To elope with another man's wife is, to be sure, a deadly sin ; but repentance and reparation are open to all sinners, and Leonforte, like many other devout persons of his nation and temperament, had notions with regard to the meaning of repentance and reparation which do not obtain amongst the cooler and more logical races who inhabit the northern regions of Europe. There would be a divorce, followed in due course by a marriage, which the Church would doubtless not refuse to sanction. The remedy was in some respects an ignoble one ; but it seemed to be the only remedy, and when matters have reached the stage of becoming intolerable, a remedy of some sort must needs be discovered. For his own part, he had proclaimed his readiness to fight Mr. Colborne, should that gentleman think fit to throw down the glove ; he could do no more. As for the Countess, whom he pictured to himself as a sort of modern Andromeda, praying Heaven to set her free from a curiously amenable monster, it was scarcely likely that she, with her free-thinking proclivities, would spurn the suggestion of an unlawful and irreligious union which might perhaps last for six months or so before it could be legalised and sanctified. At any rate Perseus, modern against his will, had been granted no other sword with which to sever her bonds. It was true that she might have no fancy for a Sicilian Perseus and might prefer her bonds and even her unobtrusive monster to his succour ; but that was just what must be ascertained. There was no alternative that the Marchese di Leonforte could discern.

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attractions for him ; but great considerations swallow up small ones. He could not have explained himself by post, nor could he rest until he should have seen the woman whom he loved, and heard his doom pronounced by her lips. It was not even certain that he would see her ; for she had made no promise to remain in Paris, and the thought that she might already have flitted elsewhere sufficed to keep him wide awake throughout the tedious night's journey.

That disappointment, however, was spared him. When he hurried off to the Avenue Friedland on the ensuing day, he was told that the Countess was at home, although she was *un peu souffrante*, and it was doubtful whether she would receive visitors. After a brief delay, during which his card was conveyed to her, it was intimated to him that he might enter, and presently he was conducted to her boudoir, where he found her extended upon a sofa, with an open French novel lying upon her knees. She held out her left hand to him without moving, and said :

' Back already ? It appears that London has made haste to weary you. *Au fait*, I did not expect you to fall in love with those people at first sight ; they are an acquired taste, and you do not assimilate fresh tastes easily.'

' I liked them,' answered Leonforte ; ' they were very kind to me. I could not stay with them, because—but I will give you an account of it all as soon as you have told me about yourself. I am grieved to hear that you have been ill since I left.'

' I am abominably ill ; I haven't the strength to stir, and I cough all the night through. Dr. Schott pulls a long face and would like me to make my will, in case of accidents ; only he is afraid that his name might not appear in it if he were to offer such unwelcome advice. I am not going to die yet, though ; and when I do die he will have reason to jump for joy, supposing that he has the good luck to survive me. Let us talk of something less lugubrious. Sit down where I can see you and relate your adventures. Have you brought me the odds and ends that I left in Carlton-House Terrace ? '

Leonforte threw up his hand and struck himself on the forehead. ' Ah, madame,' he exclaimed despairingly, ' I do not know what to say to you ! It was atrocious of me ; but the truth is that I forgot your commission altogether ! What shall I do ? Shall I return at once and execute it ? By this time to-morrow I can be with you once more, and your orders will have been carried out.'

She laughed and answered that she would not impose so troublesome a task upon him. ‘Nothing would be more simple than to send one of the servants across to England if I wanted to look at my little toys again,’ said she; ‘but I am not sure that I want to look at them, after all; they might remind me of incidents which I would just as soon forget. Pray, don’t look so ashamed of yourself; you haven’t done anything to be ashamed of. At least, I trust that you haven’t. Now whom did you see over there?—and who was it who treated you so kindly? Not Lord and Lady Burcote, I should imagine.’

‘Yes, indeed; they were most amiable. They invited me to dinner and presented me to many ladies and gentlemen. I saw also a young Mr. Innes, who spoke of you with gratitude and desired to be remembered to you. And I saw Miss Rowley, and—• and Mr. Colborne.’

‘We will come to him later on, if you don’t mind. Tell me about the others, and especially about Frank Innes. I was very fond of him—more so than of any Englishman whom I can remember—and I think he might have found time to write to me in all these months. But perhaps he did not know my address. Well; how is he getting on?’

Leonforte related what little he knew about a youth in whom he felt no particular personal interest. It was not of Frank Innes nor of Frank Innes’s chances of blossoming out into a successful professional singer that he had come to Paris to talk; but since it pleased the Countess to dwell upon this and upon other equally unimportant topics, he bowed to her wishes. Sooner or later she would have to mention her husband; and then it would become at once his duty and his privilege to say to her what he was firmly resolved not to leave the house without saying. But his patience was somewhat severely tried before she saw fit to come to the point. It was not until she had cross-examined him minutely as to his impressions of the Bureotes, as well as of a dozen other members of the British aristocracy, and had laughed heartily over some of his replies, that she remarked carelessly:

‘You don’t understand any of them a bit; but then I knew you wouldn’t. I wonder how far you advanced towards understanding Mr. Colborne, who is neither more nor less incomprehensible than the rest of them. I think you said that you did make acquaintance with him?’

‘Yes, madame, I made acquaintance with him,’ answered the

Marchese gravely ; ‘ if I had not advanced as far as that, I should not be here now. I cannot say that I entirely understand him, or any of his fellow-countrymen ; but that, perhaps, was not necessary. I think I can understand that he is what we call in Italy *galantuomo*, within the limits fixed by the peculiar customs of England, and I am sure that I can understand his intentions. He accepts the situation *tout bonnement* ; he will do nothing to alter it ; certainly he will make no scandal, nor will he compromise Miss Rowley, who appeared to me to have assumed rather prematurely the rôle of an old maid. At the same time, he allowed me to perceive that the situation was not agreeable to him.’

A slight flush coloured the Countess’s cheeks, and although she smiled at her interlocutor, her smile expressed neither affection nor respect. ‘ Dear me ! ’ she exclaimed ; ‘ so you talked the situation over together quietly and amicably, like two sensible men ! That is quite what I should have expected of him, if it isn’t precisely what I should have expected of you. And no doubt you ended by agreeing that the only satisfactory solution would be for me to betake myself to England with a hair shirt on my back and peas in my shoes, to prostrate myself before my husband and implore him to treat my past indiscretions with clemency.’

The truth was that she was very angry and bitterly disappointed. She had wanted to humiliate Douglas ; she had wanted to render him publicly ridiculous ; and now it seemed that the envoy whom she had deemed safe to discharge that kindly mission had tamely consented to parley with the enemy. She had half a mind to dismiss him from her presence forthwith ; only she was curious to hear, before he went, what had actually passed between him and her husband.

Leonforte, stung by her undisguised contempt, hastened to enlighten her. ‘ Madame,’ said he, ‘ you speak to me as if I were a coward. I will not complain of your speaking to me in that way, because, like myself, you are not English, and it may be that the habits of Englishmen are in some respects as strange to you as they are to me. But do not condemn me unheard. I was willing—I was more than willing, I was most eager—to fight Mr. Colborne ; I considered that he had at least slighted you, and nothing would have rejoiced me more than to avenge the slight in your name. But how could I challenge a man who told me in so many words that honour, as it is understood in England, did not compel him to accept my challenge ? For the rest, I must do him the justice

to say that he was not afraid of me ; he was only afraid of making himself laughed at.'

' You do not seem to have been troubled by any such apprehension. What title you can have fancied that you had to pick a quarrel with Mr. Colborne in my name I cannot guess ; but, having done so, you would have been just a shade less absurd, I should think, if you had slapped him in the face, instead of lamenting your inability to poke a hole through his right arm.'

Leonforte winced and his eyes blazed for a moment, but he did not lose his self-command. ' I do not believe that any man could have acted otherwise than as I acted,' he replied. ' I told Mr. Colborne that I would report faithfully to you the conversation which I had with him, and I will do so now, if I may claim your forbearance for a short time.'

She made a disdainful sign to him that he was at liberty to proceed, and she refrained from interrupting the recital of which he delivered himself with scrupulous exactitude, although she was more than once tempted to tell him that he had said quite enough. But her countenance and her manner were ominously composed when he ceased, and when she remarked :

' All this is most interesting, and I am charmed to hear how thoroughly you appreciate my husband and the many virtues which adorn his character. You have been a little impudent ; but one must pardon impudence which goes hand in hand with such disinterested friendship and such benevolent intentions. I presume that you have torn yourself away from your English friends only in order to suggest that I should return to be welcomed by them with open arms. It is a seductive picture ; I have hardly the heart to hold out against converting it into a reality. Shall we make the journey together ? And will you go to the Gare du Nord this evening and order a saloon carriage for me ?'

' Ah, don't jeer at me !' cried Leonforte, who felt that he had now honourably acquitted himself of all his obligations towards the man whom he desired to supplant. ' Don't you see that I was bound to tell you what Mr. Colborne said ? I have repeated his own words to you ; he has not intended to be cruel ; he would not be cruel to you intentionally if you went back to him. But of course you cannot and will not go back ; of course you cannot consent to live with one who has no real love for you ; and of course you cannot be satisfied with a separation which leaves you only nominally free. I have thought it all over : it is plain that

there must be a legal divorce, and it is not less plain that he will not help you to obtain such a divorce. What, then, remains to be done? Nothing, except that you yourself should compel him to demand it. Ah, dear Countess, I am not worthy of you; but at least I love you, and I ask nothing better than to be allowed to devote my whole life to you! It is not every day, believe me, that you will meet with such a love as mine! Come with me to Sicily, where we can forget the world and where we shall be hidden from it. When once the divorce has been pronounced by the secular authorities, you will be free to assume my name, and our union—I feel certain of it—will receive the sanction of the Church.'

He had fallen upon his knees beside her sofa and had seized her hand, which she withdrew from his grasp with a sudden jerk as she swung her feet to the ground and stood erect before him.

'Is it possible,' she exclaimed, 'for a man who is not a downright imbecile—at least, not much more of an imbecile than the ordinary run of men—to insult me so grossly and yet to deceive himself into the belief that he is rather paying me a compliment than otherwise! Evidently the thing is possible, since you are grovelling there upon the carpet as a living proof of its possibility; but I assure you that nothing short of this ludicrous spectacle could have brought conviction home to me. Even now, I am altogether at a loss to understand what excuse you can have had for imagining that I was enamoured of you.'

Leonforte scrambled up, looking pale and terribly disconcerted.

'You mistake me,' he returned; 'I have never dared to imagine what you speak of; I have only told you what you knew beforehand, that I love you with all my heart and soul; I have only ventured to offer you—'

'You have no right to offer me anything,' interrupted the Countess impatiently; 'you had no right in the world to suppose, as you seem to have supposed, that I sent you to London in order to make an unheard-of and degrading compact with my husband. I might say that I never sent you to London at all; but I don't care to shelter myself behind that equivocal defence. I did virtually send you; and would you like to know why you were sent? Simply because you are an uncivilized Italian bully, and because I assumed that you were more likely than not to make a laughing-stock of Mr. Colborne by pulling his nose in the lobby of the House of Commons or in the open street. You are quite right in saying that I mistook you, and assuredly you have mis-

taken me. As you cannot be of the slightest use to me in the future, perhaps you will now be so good as to retire and never come back again.'

He was utterly amazed by her brutal candour. It came upon him as a horrible revelation, transforming, as it were, the woman whom he had loved and hitherto respected into a sort of fiend before his very eyes. He might have guessed that her heart belonged to her husband, that she had been exasperated beyond all bearing, and that her wrath, coarse though the manifestation of it was, was not wholly ignoble; but he had little insight into human nature and little comprehension of common inconsistencies.

'Madame la Comtesse,' said he, in a voice which trembled slightly, despite all his efforts to keep it steady, 'you were very kind to me when my life was in danger; you would have been kinder still if you had allowed me to die, since you are what you tell me that you are. You say I have grossly insulted you. That may be; but you cannot think that I have meant to insult you, and I cannot doubt that you have meant to insult me. It only remains for me to promise you that your orders shall be obeyed and that you shall never again, if I can help it, be annoyed by the sight of my face.'

He bowed and made straight for the door, scarcely heeding the scornful laugh with which she responded to his parting speech. She said something about his having rendered it absolutely imperative upon her to enlighten him; but it really did not matter what she said. She had managed to persuade him that she was heartless, cruel and revengeful: if that was the process of enlightenment at which she had aimed, her object had been more than achieved.

Now, it is always an imprudent thing, and it is seldom or never an impossible thing, to convert love into hatred. The imprudence is greatly magnified when the converted or perverted lover happens to have Sicilian blood in his veins, and the Countess might have realised this, had she taken the trouble to study Leonforte's character. She had given him what his fellow-countrymen call *cattivo sangue*; she had reduced him to a condition of mind in which his fellow-countrymen are extremely apt to have recourse to poison or the stiletto, and she had earned for herself an enmity very different from that which her English husband was capable of entertaining towards her. But she was unaware of these circumstances; nor, possibly, would she have

cared very much if she had been aware of them. The Marchese was not, and never had been, anything to her. She was indignant against him and glad to have been able to hurt him and glad to have got rid of him—that was all. She dismissed him from her memory with as much ease as she had dismissed him from her presence.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

LEONFORTE DOES WHAT SEEMS PRACTICABLE.

THE Anglo-Saxon race (which, it must be owned, is not given to ignoring, through any excess of modesty, the many sterling qualities which are its inheritance), might well return thanks for a few negative blessings, as well as for those positive and obvious ones conferred upon it by Heaven. We are, for example, practically unacquainted with that intense desire for vengeance which is one of the most irresistible passions that belong to the Southern nature. An Englishman, when he has been wronged by another man, usually wishes to thrash that man, and is not at all unlikely to carry his wish into effect. If, for one reason or another, he is precluded from so doing, he either has recourse to the law or swallows down his wrath : it would not give him any satisfaction to stab his adversary in the back. When his adversary chances to be of the opposite sex, he can do nothing, and does not care to do anything, except turn his back upon her : women cannot be thrashed, nor would there be much comfort in finding out their vulnerable points and striking them there. But Consuls at Mediterranean sea-ports are well aware that Spaniards, Italians and Greeks feel quite differently. These people allow the sun to go down upon their wrath ; they do not mind waiting for months and years before paying off old scores ; they almost always pay them off eventually, and, as far as can be judged from their statements when they are placed in the dock, they appease the voice of conscience rather than awaken it by their tardy reprisals. Something there must be in their temperament which is foreign to ours, and consequently incomprehensible to us, but which, if we are prudent, we shall do well to take into account before falling out with them.

The Countess Radna, who was fearless by constitution, and who had been rendered somewhat disdainful of humanity at large by

the force of circumstances, had no conception of the tempest which she had aroused in the breast of her rejected admirer. As has been said, she dismissed him forthwith from her memory, and she would have been greatly astonished to hear that the man who had taken leave of her with a certain dignity and outward appearance of composure would, if a dagger had been placed in his hand, have killed her and then committed suicide almost unhesitatingly and certainly without compunction. The only reasons why no such tragedy had been enacted were, in the first place, that he had not been provided with a lethal weapon ; and, in the second, that he had learnt by a rigid course of self-discipline to control his impulses. But in Sicily revenge and the necessity for it scarcely belong to the category of mere impulses. Leonforte knew that an angry man—that is to say, a man whom anger affects as it affected him—is neither more nor less than a lunatic ; in early life he had perceived, partly through personal experience and partly through observation of others, that it is ignoble to fall, even for a few instants, under the sway of sheer lunacy. He had therefore set himself to subdue his nature, and had been successful, although in subduing it he had not changed it. When he had told the Countess that she should never, if he could help it, see his face again, he had not meant to imply that he had done with her. It was as clear to him as the sun in Heaven that he must avenge the affronts with which he had been loaded by her, and so strangely are some varieties of the human race constituted that he would have parted with all sense of self-respect had he consented to disappear then and there out of her life. She had called him an uncivilised Italian bully ; she had told him, with a cynicism which she had not thought it worth while to disguise, that he had been employed by her solely in that supposititious capacity ; she had not only mortally offended him but had degraded herself in his estimation to such a degree that he now regarded her with a loathing akin to that which converted idolaters seem to experience towards their false gods. Neither the converted idolaters nor men of the stamp of the Marchese di Leonforte are apt to realise that their false gods and goddesses are but figments of their own imagination, and that it is idle to quarrel with abstractions.

The non-existent being whom Leonforte took for the Countess Radna was no abstraction to him ; she lived and breathed in the person of the lady who bore that name, and it was a question whether she ought to be suffered to live and breathe any longer.

At the very least, life must be made a dubious advantage for her. He could no more think of forgiving her for having so horribly deceived him than he could have thought of forgiving the murderer of his nearest relations.

Now this was all very fine, and there was some relief, though not very much, to be gained by pacing up and down his room half the night through and beating his head against the wall at intervals ; but when, in the grey light of dawn, he began to take stock of the means at his command, he did not find it so easy to see how the existence of this wicked woman was to be rendered hateful to her. What, after all, was he to do to her, unless he assassinated her ? Of her beauty and her wealth he could not deprive her ; and if, by denouncing her to her husband, he could deprive her of that slight clog upon her freedom she would be much obliged to him. Nevertheless, he eventually resolved to take that preliminary step. It would not be a long step ; but it would be a shade better than total inaction, and he had divined that, although she did not love Mr. Colborne, it would gall her to hear that she had acquired Mr. Colborne's disgust and contempt. Moreover, England seemed to offer more opportunities of serving her an ill turn than could be hoped for in Paris. With time and patience opportunities are pretty sure to arrive anywhere ; but the wise man seeks the most promising field.

Thus it came to pass that Leonforte was back in his London hotel within thirty-six hours of his departure thence, and that, twelve hours later, he was once more seeking admittance into those Clarges Street rooms which he had previously visited on quite another errand. He found the new Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in the act of flitting. Friends had represented to Douglas that it was hardly consistent with the dignity belonging to his official position and the salary attached thereto that he should continue to live in lodgings ; so he had taken a furnished house in the same street for a few months, and was about to move into it when the Italian's card was brought to him. He was very busy ; he did not want to be interrupted, and he was by no means desirous of holding further parley with one whose relations towards him and his wife seemed to have been exhaustively discussed in a previous interview. Still, since the man had apparently thought fit to return to the charge, it was perhaps necessary that he should be received, and he was received accordingly.

'I am afraid I can't spare you more than a few minutes,' Douglas began by saying. 'My time is not my own, and, as you see, I am in the act of effecting a change of quarters. Please, don't think me rude if I beg you to say at once what I can do for you.'

'I am sorry that I have intruded upon you at an inconvenient moment, Mr. Colborne,' answered the other; 'but I will not detain you long. A few minutes will suffice for what I have to say to you. You can do nothing for me; but possibly I may be able to do something for you, and that is my excuse for being here. Since I last had the honour of calling upon you I have been to Paris, I have seen the Countess Radna, and I have reported to her, as I promised you that I would, the substance of our conversation. I think it only fair to tell you that her reception of me was not what I had anticipated, and that I now know her better than I did two days ago. Sir, you have done well to separate yourself from that woman; she has no heart.'

'Hasn't she?' returned Douglas, with a smile. 'I don't know whether I ought to congratulate you or condole with you upon having made that discovery; but I believe I mentioned to you before that it is not I who have separated myself from her; it is she who has separated herself from me. Did you come here simply and solely in order to inform me that my wife has no heart?'

'I came,' replied the Marchese, 'in order to tell you the truth about her; you ought to know it. I will not speak of myself—naturally, you can feel no sympathy for me—but you will probably comprehend the Countess as I now comprehend her when I tell you that, by her own confession, she sent me to England in the hope that I should hold you up to public scorn and shame by pulling your nose in the open street. That, she admits, was her only object, and she has turned me out of her house, like a disobedient valet, because I have not gratified her.'

'I thought,' observed Douglas, 'that you had denied being the bearer of any commission from her. If you had tried to pull my nose in the street, I should probably have tried to knock you down; you wouldn't have brought any very alarming amount of public scorn and shame upon me in any case. I suppose what you mean is, that you have been duped and that you are angry. Well, as you truly say, it would be contrary to nature for me to sympathise with you.'

'I do not ask for sympathy ; I ask only that you should believe that I have acted in good faith. On my side, I believe that you also have acted in good faith. I spoke the truth when I said that I held no commission from the Countess : nevertheless, it was on her behalf that I came to London, and she encouraged me to make the journey for a purpose which I was far from suspecting. You and I, Mr. Colborne, we are both honest men, and we have both been the dupes of a cruel and dishonest woman. I thought it due to you, as well as to myself, to make the situation clear by saying this.'

The dignified attitude assumed by the Italian did not commend itself to the straightforward common sense of the Englishman, who rejoined :

'I really can't see what you are driving at. I dare say you may have been duped ; but it seems to me that, if you have, that is your own look-out. I haven't been duped in any way that I know of, and I don't particularly care whether my wife wished you to pull my nose or not.'

'You don't care ! You don't care that she loves neither you nor me, but that she would like to spite one of us and that she was not ashamed to make an unworthy use of the devotion of the other !'

'Not the least bit in the world. To be frank with you, I doubt whether your devotion to her was of such a worthy description that she was bound to be over nice in her methods of turning it to account ; and as for her designs upon my nose, I can forgive her for them, since they didn't come off. The long and the short of the whole business appears to be that you jumped to unwarrantable conclusions. So much the worse for you ! And, in a certain sense, so much the better for me !'

The Marchese ground his teeth and muttered something between them which Douglas's ignorance of Italian prevented him from understanding to be a trenchant condemnation of the English nation at large. He said aloud :

'Mr. Colborne, I perceive that it would be useless for me to trespass further on your time. I was aware that you had no love for your wife ; I supposed—though doubtless I was mistaken—that you had some love for your honour. *Basta !*—I can say no more, except to repeat that, if you should consider any reparation on my part owing to you, I am entirely at your orders.'

'Thank you very much,' answered Douglas, laughing ; 'but I

have no anxiety to fight you, and there seems to be even less necessity for a duel between us now than there was when you were last kind enough to make me the same offer.'

The Marchese raised his shoulders and his eyebrows, drew his heels together, bowed and departed. It is not very easy to say why Mr. Colborne's supercilious indifference should have had the effect of enraging him, for he had not really expected anything else ; but there is always, of course, a shade of distinction between anticipation and actual experience. For the rest, if he had not as yet accomplished much, he had at least done what it had seemed to him practicable to do ; and he suspected that the Englishman, notwithstanding all that outward show of unconcern, must have been inwardly wounded, while it could no longer be possible for him to cherish any illusions as to his wife's true character. Leonforte was as certain as he was of his own existence that he hated and despised the Countess Radna ; yet he was not sorry to be furnished with a plausible excuse for hating and despising Mr. Colborne into the bargain.

He was not far wrong in his surmise that Douglas had been wounded by a disclosure which could scarcely be agreeable to the most phlegmatic of husbands. A very phlegmatic and philosophic person might, no doubt, have drawn from it inferences flattering to his personal vanity, and Douglas had been pleased to hint that this was just what he had done ; but in reality he deceived himself with no such dubious consolation. Being himself absolutely honest and straightforward, he neither liked nor made allowance for the crooked ways of women. Even if he had possessed the love of one who manifested her affection by egging on a stranger to insult him publicly, he would not have thought it worth having ; but the mere fact of her having harboured that intention appeared to him to be convincing proof that he did not possess it. Why could she not say so and have done with it ? Why could she not be satisfied with her liberty, which he had made no attempt to curtail ? What injury had he ever done her that she must needs hatch spiteful and underhand plots against him ? Were all women like that ? Most of them, perhaps, were ; yet he thought he knew of one, at least, who was an exception to the general rule ; and, having a little spare time at his disposal that afternoon, he decided to employ it in calling upon Peggy Rowley. He said to himself that it would refresh him to converse with a member of the opposite sex who was as honourable, as

plain-spoken, and almost as comprehensible as an average gentleman.

But, as luck would have it, he had chosen his moment ill, and he found his influential friend, for once, in a very bad temper. What he had thought of as possibly desirable after their last conversation had come to pass ; that very morning Miss Spofforth had felt it her duty to report sundry remarks which had been made to her by various ladies who took a kindly interest in Miss Rowley, and to caution the latter that people who take upon themselves to create Under-Secretaries of State must not be surprised if their names are coupled with those of their *protégés*. This had vexed Peggy all the more because it was so perfectly true and so perfectly reasonable. She enjoyed a freedom of conduct which circumstances refuse to ninety-nine out of a hundred young women ; but there are limits which it is foolish to transgress, just as there are friendly relations which it is impossible to explain with any hope of being believed ; so that it had to be admitted that, if Lady Winkfield chose to insinuate nasty things about her, Lady Winkfield had solid ground under her feet. The only sensible course to pursue was, in the first place, to snub Miss Spofforth severely (which was done without delay), and, in the second, to see rather less of Douglas Colborne in the future than she had done in the past. The necessity which she recognised made her, however, very cross, and when Douglas was shown into her drawing-room, she greeted him with the not over civil exclamation of :

' How extraordinary of you to turn up at this hour of the day ! I thought you never had time for paying visits. I'm just off to Hurlingham ; but I can give you twenty minutes if you have come about anything in particular.'

He replied that he had only come for the pleasure of having a chat with her, but that he would sacrifice that pleasure and take himself off at once, if he wasn't wanted. Nevertheless, he remained where he was, and it did not take him very long to divulge the true object of his visit, which was to tell her about the revelation made to him by the Marchese di Leonforte and to ascertain what she thought of it.

Her opinion was soon stated : it was neither sympathetic nor couched in polite language. ' You and your wife are a pair of fools,' said she ; ' I have no patience with either of you. Between you, you seem to be doing your very utmost to stir up a scandal out of nothing at all, and I dare say you will succeed in the long

run, if you go on like this. Considering that you both ardently desire to kiss and make friends, one would have thought that your simplest plan would have been to do so, without calling in the assistance of bloodthirsty foreigners. But I suppose you know your own business best.'

'I don't know whether my wife and I are a couple of fools or not,' returned Douglas, with a touch of acerbity; 'but I do know that there isn't the faintest prospect of our kissing and making friends. This man Leonforte seems to have been taken in just as I was, and there is no question of bloodthirsty foreigners or their assistance. I thought that perhaps your feminine wit might enable you to hit upon my wife's motive for despatching him here; but apparently you can only suggest the obvious and vulgar one, in which I don't happen to believe. I suppose you must have changed your mind since you impressed upon me that my best plan was to leave my wife severely alone.'

'That was some little time ago, wasn't it? One can't leave people alone for ever—that is, unless one *wants* to leave them alone for ever. But I don't pretend to be an authority upon the subject of love, with all its complications and ramifications; my accomplishments, when I come to reckon them up, are remarkably few in number. I have some knowledge of politics, and a little of gardening, and very little indeed of the game of polo, which I am just going to look on at. Miss Spofforth tells me—and I should think most likely she is right—that I am altogether deficient as regards *savoir vivre* and *savoir faire*. For goodness' sake, don't consult me about your matrimonial difficulties!—my advice wouldn't be worth listening to. If you follow your nose, you will end by reaching some destination; and one is about as good as another. Fifty years hence none of the things that agitate us now will signify the least little bit.'

It is a poor sort of friend who can find nothing better than such cold comfort as that to offer to a perplexed fellow-creature; and Douglas, after taking his leave, said to himself that he had been too hasty in pronouncing Miss Rowley superior to the rest of her sex. He was hurt and piqued; he resolved that for the future he would keep his own affairs to himself; but it never entered his head to imagine that poor Peggy, on her side, might be more deserving of pity than of resentment. If such an idea had entered into his head, he would not have been the simple, honest gentleman that he was.

CHAPTER XXXV.

AT HURLINGHAM.

RUMINATING upon various possible contingencies and combinations, Leonforte went on his way from Clarges Street towards the hotel at which he was sojourning. His way led him down St. James's Street, and, just as he was turning out of that thoroughfare into Pall Mall, he was accosted by a smartly-dressed young gentleman, with a flower in his button-hole, who exclaimed :

'Hullo! How are you? Somebody told me you had left London.'

The Marchese raised his hat ceremoniously; he was not yet habituated to our insular mode of saluting male acquaintances. 'Enchanted to meet you again, Mr. Innes,' said he, in his deep, solemn voice. 'Yes; I have been across to Paris; but I have returned, as you see.'

'Dear me! you haven't been long about it. You saw the Countess, of course; did you give her my message? Look here; if you aren't doing anything particular, will you come into my club and have some lunch? I'm sure you must have lots of interesting things to tell me, if you will. I'm awfully interested in the Countess and in my cousin, you know.'

After a bare second or two of hesitation, Leonforte decided to accept the young man's proffered hospitality. He was at least as much interested in the persons named as Frank Innes could be, and he did not mean to neglect any chance of gaining fresh information about either of them. Consequently, he said what he deemed to be fitting and courteous, and a few minutes later he was eating salmon *mayonnaise* and drinking claret-cup in the strangers' room of Mr. Innes's club, while that gentleman was plying him with questions of which he could not but admire the innocent indiscretion.

He, for his part, was wary and discreet; he thought it undesirable to mention what did not seem to be suspected; he was willing to accept provisionally the character ascribed to him of a disinterested friend of the Countess Radna's; he allowed it to be supposed that he had undertaken that hurried journey to Paris as a peacemaker, and he professed to regret sincerely that he had not found himself able to do anything towards healing a rupture which he feared

was more serious and likely to prove more permanent than Mr. Innes imagined.

'Oh, I expect it will all come right in the long run,' said Frank cheerfully; 'things generally do end by coming all right, unless there's some horrid old woman or other who is bent upon setting them wrong. And there's no old woman in this case, you see.'

He sighed, thinking of his own, in which the malignant influence of a horrid old woman was only too prominent a feature. Presently he began to talk about his own case; for he rather liked this grave Italian, whose eyes had a kindly expression, and he was always ready to confide his secrets to anybody who would listen to them. Perhaps, too, the claret-cup, of which he had partaken much more freely than his abstemious guest had done, may have helped to render him additionally communicative.

Leonforte, when he had been informed at considerable length of the nature of Frank's aspirations and of the well-nigh insuperable difficulties which that sanguine youth did not despair of conquering, opined that Lady Burcote, old and horrid though she might be, could scarcely be blamed for declining to bestow her daughter upon a wwould-be professional singer. He said :

'Many strange things are done in England; but in no country in the world has it ever been permissible for a lady of rank to marry an actor. Why do you not leave it to be a question of money alone? Poverty, I agree, is an obstacle, and a grave one; still it is not—pardon me the word—it is not derogation.'

'I assure you,' answered Frank, laughing, 'that we consider poverty next door to disgrace, and we have quite given up the idea that there is anything disgraceful in marrying actors or actresses. Lady Burcote wouldn't mind my playing a barrel-organ in the streets if I could show her that I was making ten thousand a year by it.'

The Marchese ventured to express polite incredulity. He could not believe that the description given by Mr. Innes of the British aristocracy was accurate, nor could he imagine that any gentleman, after having thrown up an honourable profession in order to follow such a trade as that of singing in public, would be admitted into a noble family, even though his self-abasement should bring him in so large an income as ten thousand a year.

'And I presume,' he added, 'that you would have to sing a very long time and be very successful before you could gain half or a quarter as much.'

'Ah! that's just where it is!' assented Frank; 'that's just the trouble. You're mistaken in thinking that the Burcotes have any old-fashioned prejudices, though. Douglas agrees with you; but then he's a bit old-fashioned himself. Miss Rowley, who is more up to date, knows better. By the way, did I introduce you to Miss Rowley?'

Leonforte pricked up his ears. He had not yet been presented to Miss Rowley, and, for reasons which he did not deem it necessary to specify, he was much more eager to be presented to her than to listen any longer to a commonplace narrative of thwarted affections.

'You omitted to confer a great privilege and a great pleasure upon me,' he replied. 'If you contemplated honouring me so far, perhaps I may hope that you will repair the omission at some future date. I have heard a great deal about Miss Rowley, and I should be proud to make her acquaintance.'

'Oh, you *have* heard of Miss Peggy, then?' Frank rejoined. 'Well, I don't wonder at that, because everybody has heard of her. She's tremendously clever, and she's a real good sort into the bargain, in spite of her rough tongue. Would you care to drive out to Hurlingham with me presently? I know she'll be there, and Hurlingham is one of our national institutions which you ought to see before you publish your impressions of England and the English.'

The Marchese, who took every word that was said to him quite seriously and literally, disclaimed any intention of adding another volume to the many which have been written upon the manners and customs of this island by intelligent foreigners; but he said he should like very much to see Hurlingham and Miss Rowley, and Frank remarked that, in that case, it was about time to call a hansom.

A great many people had adopted a similar course and had betaken themselves to the same destination that afternoon; for, by some strange chance, the weather was fine and warm, although summer was at its height. At the end of a drive during which conversation had languished a little, the unsuspecting Frank and the astute individual towards whom he quaintly imagined that he was acting the part of a sort of juvenile mentor found quite a crowd of fashionable persons looking on at polo in the intervals of social intercourse, and the former generously refused to let his attention be diverted from his immediate purpose by the first

spectacle that met his eyes—which was the unpleasing one of Lord Galashiels, engaged in holding a sunshade over the head of Lady Florence Carey. He had not come to Hurlingham in order to see Lady Florence, still less with any hope of being permitted to speak to her; he was a mere spectator, and his anxiety to redeem as speedily as possible the promise that he had made to introduce his companion to Miss Rowley was none the less legitimate because spectators can always fulfil their functions more satisfactorily when they are not hampered by companions.

‘There she is!’ he exclaimed, as soon as his eager scrutiny of the throng had been rewarded by the discovery of the lady for whom he was looking—‘that tall woman in the striped gown. Come along; she’ll be delighted to meet you. She and Douglas Colborne are as thick as thieves, and she understands him a good bit better than I do, I expect. You and she ought to put your heads together and see whether something can’t be done. She’ll represent Douglas and you’ll represent the Countess, don’t you know. And then you can thrash the whole question out between you.’

Leonforte, without moving a muscle, answered that that was a very promising suggestion, and while he was being led up to the lady in the striped gown, he said to himself that he might do worse than begin by assuring her of the high esteem in which he held the newly-appointed member of the British Ministry.

But Peggy, who, as has been related, had heard all about him, and who, as has likewise been related, was not in the best of tempers, cut short his introductory observations somewhat brusquely.

‘Oh, yes; Mr. Colborne is a friend of mine,’ she replied; ‘but I am surprised to hear that he is a friend of yours. I suppose I must have been misinformed; for I was under the impression that you thirsted for his blood.’

This was momentarily embarrassing, but only momentarily so. It was evident that Miss Rowley had already been taken into Mr. Colborne’s confidence; and that fact alone sufficed to throw a vivid light upon their mutual relations. It was also of a nature to throw some light upon the dark path of a tentative schemer. Leonforte smiled and remarked:

‘I perceive that you have been well informed. It is true that, a short time ago, I was Mr. Colborne’s enemy; but I am his enemy no longer. Is it permitted to me to inquire whether that information has been conveyed to you as well?’

Peggy took stock of her questioner, from head to heel, in a leisurely fashion before she made up her mind that it would be beneath her to prevaricate. Then she answered :

' Mr. Colborne called upon me just now and mentioned that you had been with him. As far as I could understand him, you didn't seek him out upon a precisely friendly errand ; but possibly I may have mistaken him, or he may have mistaken you. Either way, it doesn't much matter to me, and I don't see why it should matter to you. As a general rule, squabbles between husbands and wives are best left alone by outsiders, don't you think so ? '

' No doubt that is so ; but I can hardly count myself as what you call an outsider. For a time the Countess Radna honoured me with her friendship ; for a time I thought that it was an honour ; I believed in her friendship, and I believed besides that she was a cruelly ill-used lady. I know now, because she herself has told me so, that she simply took advantage of my credulity. She only hoped that I should pick a quarrel with her husband, whom she hates ; and, as it was impossible for me to quarrel with a man who, according to your rules, was justified in refusing to meet me, I have been dismissed and insulted by her. After this personal explanation, which I apologise for intruding upon your notice, you will understand why I cannot remain an outsider as regards the differences between Mr. Colborne and his wife.'

' Yet,' observed Peggy, who, during the Marchese's speech, had been scrutinising the polo-players through her field-glasses, ' you seem to have been put rather emphatically outside. I haven't been quite so ruthlessly snubbed as you have been ; still I am not less outside than you are, and I propose to stay where I am. Why shouldn't I ? The outer air isn't so very cold, after all.'

' To some people,' returned Leonforte, who flattered himself that he had taken his neighbour's measure, ' heat is as unendurable as cold, and no temperature is endurable when it is forced upon them. I am one of those people, and I think, Miss Rowley, that you are another. I think you must love the Countess Radna as little as I do. I do not presume to say more.'

' May I ask,' inquired Peggy, lowering her glasses and surveying the Italian from beneath half-closed eyelids, ' what you mean by saying as much ? Because you appear to mean something or other, and I can't for the life of me guess what it can be.'

' I mean,' replied the Marchese, a trifle disconcerted, yet re-

solved not to shrink from timely audacity, 'that the treatment which I have received from the Countess on one side and from Mr. Colborne on the other has opened my eyes. I mean that, instead of loving her—yes, I will own that I once loved her!—I now abhor a woman who could use me as she has used me; and I mean that I am ready to offer you my alliance against her, if you will accept it.'

Peggy stared at the man, who was evidently in earnest and in whose dark eyes there was a fire which could scarcely have been made to illumine them without genuine emotion.

'You are a very unconventional person,' she remarked. 'Perhaps I am a very conventional or a very stupid one; for, even after that excited statement, I am still rather in the dark as to your intentions. I understand that you are in a rage with the Countess Radna; but why you should offer me your alliance against her, or what you expect me to do with it, Heaven alone knows!'

'Ah, Miss Rowley, I am sure that you cannot wish me to put my thought into more distinct language. Is it not enough that all the world is aware of the—shall I say the friendship?—which you feel for Mr. Colborne? That is not my concern, nor can I tell what my alliance may be worth to you. I merely desire to assure you that, such as it is, it is at your service.'

The Marchese was not quite so insane as he may appear in thus addressing a lady of untarnished reputation. He was a poor judge of character; but he was not devoid of that quick instinct which belongs to the Latin races and which, having no mature deliberation to balance it, leads them into occasional absurd errors, as well as into occasional brilliant hits. He knew enough to know that humbug would have no chance of success with Peggy Rowley, whereas unhesitating candour might; and, from his point of view, he was probably right in playing the bold game. Nevertheless, he gained nothing by it, except a rebuke of the severity of which he was not entitled to complain.

'You seem,' observed Miss Rowley, 'to be under a delusion which I humbly trust that all the world doesn't share. All the world—supposing that it had nothing more amusing or interesting to exercise its ingenuity upon—might easily realise your position and why you have so suddenly turned your coat; but I haven't the slightest motive for turning mine, and if I wanted to hurt your former friend and your present foe, I shouldn't look about for an

ally. One would rather not be rude ; still one isn't called upon to submit to gratuitous impertinence ; so I think, with your permission, our acquaintance shall end here. We needn't make a fuss about it ; only when we meet in future we won't speak, if you please.'

There was nothing for Leonforte to do but to take off his hat and retire. He did so with a feeling of bitter resentment in his heart against Miss Rowley which she had scarcely earned. He could not but acknowledge that she had a perfect right to dismiss him contemptuously ; yet he was equally unable to allow her credit for the exalted sentiments to which she appeared to lay claim. He blamed his own clumsiness ; but that did not prevent him from adding her name to the increasing list of those towards whom he harboured a grudge, and with whom it behoved him, sooner or later, to be even.

He might have felt in some degree comforted, had it been in his power to pierce through the shield of Peggy's assumed composure and to discover that their brief colloquy had been fully as humiliating and as infuriating to her as it had been to him. Peggy reasoned that the man would never have dared to approach her with such hints unless he had had some solid ground to go upon ; she was less at her ease as to the verdict of 'all the world' than she had affected to be ; she realised that she had been stupid and imprudent ; and when Frank Innes strolled up, with a woe-begone face and a dismal account of how he had failed to obtain the faintest sign of recognition from Lady Florence Carey, she turned upon him and snapped at him viciously.

'I wish to goodness,' she exclaimed, 'you would devote your time to your business of practising scales, instead of coming here to worry people who have deserved better treatment at your hands ! I can't make Florence Carey speak to you, if she doesn't want to speak to you. And please don't introduce any more foreign adventurers to me : I don't like the breed.'

CHAPTER XXXVI.

INCORRUPTIBLE PETER.

To be at enmity with several individuals who are, or ought to be, at enmity with one another, to have been spurned by each and all

of them, and to discern no existing means of inflicting annoyance upon any of them, is not a very satisfactory state of affairs for a vindictive person to face. But Leonforte was patient as well as vindictive ; he argued that something must needs happen before long, and he resigned himself to provisional inactivity, to remaining on the spot, and to awaiting the course of events. It was simple and not altogether unpleasant to remain upon the spot. He would even have enjoyed himself, if his unsatisfied vengeance, his smouldering wrath and his wounded pride had not kept him in a constant condition of mental disease ; for the society of the British capital showed him much kindness and hospitality. He profited by the introductions which he had obtained from the Countess Radna ; he renewed friendly relations with Lord and Lady Burcote ; his high respectability was vouched for at the Italian Embassy ; and if all the entertainments to which he was bidden did not entertain him, they at least rendered him the service of leaving him with no idle time upon his hands.

Every now and then he encountered Miss Rowley, who stared over his head ; once or twice he exchanged a passing salute with the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and he frequently met and conversed with Frank Innes, who continued to be communicative. But he did not, as the days and weeks went on, learn very much more about these people than he already knew. There had been, it appeared, a certain amount of gossip respecting Mr. Colborne and Miss Rowley ; only it had languished for want of fuel. Mr. Colborne was not often seen at social gatherings, and Peggy was perhaps too popular to be made the subject of an organised attack.

The truth was that a decided coolness had come over the intimacy of two people who ought to have known much better than to listen to any voices save those of their respective consciences. To the collective voice of her own sex, which seemed to have pronounced her imprudent, it was, no doubt, advisable that Peggy should pay some heed ; but there could not be any necessity for her to go out of her way to treat an old and unoffending friend with marked incivility, and the old and unoffending friend did not like it. Feminine voices penetrated also to his ears, insinuating that Miss Rowley was angry with him because she was disappointed in him. Some of the insinuated reasons for her disappointment he did not choose to understand ; but others sounded plausible. It could not be denied that she was ambitious and inclined to be arbitrary ; more than once she had attempted to

shape a political course for him ; there was nothing so very extravagant in the suggestion that she had aimed at securing a personal representative in the Administration and had been disgusted to find that all her exertions towards the attainment of that end had been thrown away. If that was the case, she must be left to recover herself and to reach a more reasonable frame of mind at her leisure : he really could not gratify her by asking her advice as to the conduct of public affairs. Thus it came to pass that a couple of human beings who, between them, could boast of considerably more common sense than is allotted to any ordinary half-dozen of our species allowed themselves to be estranged in deference to the cackle of a flock of geese.

One of them sought and found consolation in work ; the other, having no special work assigned to her by Providence, could not be happy unless she was befriending somebody ; and, as it was no longer possible for her to befriend Douglas Colborne, she not unnaturally turned her attention to Frank Innes. She could not, to be sure, encourage that love-lorn youth in his absurd aspirations ; it was her duty to discourage him, and she told him so ; but at the same time she did not see that duty compelled her to refuse him her sympathy. He had done nothing wrong ; he was the victim of circumstances and of an artificial state of society ; if it comforted him to call upon her from time to time and pour forth the tale of his alternate hopes and misgivings, the least that she could do was to concede that small comfort to a distressed fellow-creature.

Towards the end of the season, however, it occurred to her that she might permissibly do a little more than that for him. Frank was now a free man, inasmuch as he had resigned his Government clerkship ; he was studying the art of vocal interpretation under competent instructors, and he talked vaguely of visiting Germany or Italy before making his formal *début* ; but his plans were as yet quite unsettled, and it did not seem improbable that he might care to spend a week or ten days at Swinford Manor after everybody should have left London. Upon the eve of her own departure, therefore, Peggy gave him an invitation which was instantly and gratefully accepted. He did not know, or if he did know, he had forgotten, that Burcote Hall was situated at a distance of barely eight miles from Swinford Manor ; much less could he, under his present sentence of banishment, be aware that the noble owner of that demesne (which had been let for several years past) proposed

to spend the summer months there, having failed to find a fresh tenant. Frank jumped at Miss Rowley's proffered hospitality because he had a secret hope that her kindness of heart might prompt her to show a similar favour to Lady Florence; but Peggy, who harboured no such nefarious design, thought it only fair to warn him that he must expect to be bored.

'There will be nothing for you to do,' she said, 'and nobody for you to see, except a few tedious fellow-guests. Still it will be open to you to bolt as soon as you have had enough of us; the Great Western Railway provides frequent fast trains.'

Inwardly she reflected: 'It won't be any fault of mine if he chances to meet the girl; I don't keep a prison or a school, and I can't prevent my friends from roaming about the country when they are staying with me. Not that she can possibly marry him; only an interview might cheer him up for the time being, and might embolden her to refuse her ennobled manufacturer once more. One would be justified in doing anything one could towards rendering her that real service.'

That a superior woman like Peggy Rowley should have allowed herself to indulge in casuistry of that description is, of course, only one more unneeded instance of the perverse workings of the female mind; but it must be said for her that she honestly had not anticipated meeting the Burcotes at a flower-show in Lord Winkfield's grounds to which Frank was dragged, somewhat against his will, on the afternoon following that of his arrival under her roof. There they were, nevertheless; and Lord Galashiels was with them; and, as the most watchful of mothers can hardly manage to exercise constant supervision in a throng of two or three hundred people, it was eventually found practicable by an adroit young man to approach a lady who had not bowed to him, but who, he felt quite sure, was aware of his proximity. Lady Florence had escaped into one of the orchid-houses, and was bending, with an interest slightly too intense to be altogether genuine, over a superb odontoglossum, when Frank's voice whispered close to her ear:

'Won't you speak to me?'

She answered in a rapid undertone and without turning round, 'I shall get into the most awful row that ever was if I do. You had better go away before Mamma comes and catches sight of you; I don't think she has seen you yet. What in the world has brought you here?'

Miss Rowley's waggonette. I'm on a visit to her; but I little

imagined that such a piece of luck as this was in store for me. I wonder whether *she* did ! Anyhow, nothing will induce me to stir from this spot, unless you'll come too. *Do* come !—if it's only for five minutes. There are lots of shrubberies and places which your mother won't think of searching.'

Lady Florence glanced over her shoulder and shook her head. 'I couldn't do it !' she murmured ; 'it would be as much as my life was worth ! I have been forbidden to speak to you or take any notice of you. Did you think I had cut you all this time of my own accord ?'

'I didn't know ; I hoped you hadn't. But it's awfully hard work to keep up one's faith when one hasn't, after all, any absolute promise to fall back upon. You did promise me, though, that you wouldn't be bullied into marrying Galashiels, whatever might happen.'

'Oh, no ; I'm sure I never made such a promise as that,' returned the girl hurriedly ; 'you must have forgotten what I said. You talk about its being hard to keep faith ; but you don't know how much harder it is for me than it can possibly be for you. I wish I could tell you—but I can't ; because Mamma will have noticed by this time that I have given her the slip, even if she hasn't noticed that you are here.'

Lady Burcote, indeed, gave evidence of her vigilance by entering the hothouse at that moment. She was arrayed in a costume quite as juvenile as, and far more costly than, that which Lady Florence wore ; she was attended by one of those middle-aged young men who had admired her in years gone by and whose gallantries were still acceptable to her. If she saw Frank Innes, she did not appear to do so, and she passed her arm through her daughter's after a sprightly and companionable fashion which she had often found to be effective in its influence upon bystanders. Lady Burcote is not and never has been respected ; but she is not, never has been, and never will be, a contemptible antagonist. The lives of an appreciable section of our fellow-mortals are made or marred in accordance with the goodwill and pleasure of Lady Burcote and her congeners.

Frank, at all events, could do nothing to prevent this unscrupulous lady from drawing her daughter away from him, nor could he, during the remainder of the afternoon, obtain a second opportunity of approaching Lady Florence. Yet it was simply essential and indispensable that he should ascertain what she had been going to say to him when that old harridan of a mother of

hers had interrupted her, because there could be no question as to the fact that she had been going to say something interesting and important. He dogged her footsteps; but there was not much use in doing that, since her mother and Galashiels clung to her like a couple of leeches; she ignored him persistently from first to last; and the only thing that gave him a spicce of comfort was that he saw her talking for nearly ten minutes to Miss Rowley's gardener, who was present in a professional capacity. She could not have been talking to the man about flowers all that time; so the chances were that she had some previous acquaintance with him. Peter Chervil did not look like a particularly valuable link; still he might prove to be a sort of a link, and it might prove worth while to cultivate him. Straws will not save a drowning man; yet drowning men are said to clutch at them, and Frank, metaphorically speaking, determined to clutch Peter Chervil by the hair.

It was in pursuance of this resolution that he rose, next day, long before the breakfast hour and strolled across the wide expanse of lawn which encompasses Swinford Manor. Not a word had been said by his hostess, in the meantime, concerning an encounter of which it might be assumed that she was not ignorant; but certain remarks of a disquieting nature had been made, during dinner on the foregoing evening, by irresponsible and innocent persons. It appeared to be taken for granted that Lady Burcote proposed to marry her daughter to Lord Galashiels, and it likewise appeared to be an understood thing that when Lady Burcote proposed, no power, human or divine, could prevent her from disposing. Her ladyship had not been gently handled; her worldliness and cruelty had been duly condemned, while her daughter's reluctance to be thus summarily settled in life had been pronounced notorious; but it had been agreed that the matron would triumph over the maid, and Peggy's voice had not been raised in dissent.

All this gave Frank food for gloomy reflection and debarred him from appreciating the dewy freshness of early morn. Two men were hard at work with a mowing-machine and a booted pony; further on he came upon one who was engaged in cutting roses for the house, and looked as sad over it as gardeners always do over that painful, necessary operation; but it was not until he had perambulated three conservatories that he ran to earth the individual of whom he was in search. Peter glanced up, touched his hat and said:

'Fine mornin', sir.'

'Very,' answered Frank. ' Didn't I see you at the flower-show yesterday afternoon ? '

' You might ha' done, sir. I were there ; though I didn't see nothin' as I couldn't ha' beat out o' my own houses. Fact is, sir, I didn't go so much for to see any blooms as they could show me as because I heard tell as Lady Florence was to be there.'

' Oh, you know Lady Florence then ? ' said Frank, pricking up his ears.

' Known her since she worn't scarcely so 'igh as your walkin'-stick, sir. My old aunt Eliza, as is bedridden now up at the almshouses at Stoke Morton, she was nurse in the fam'ly, and terrible anxious she is for to see Lady Florence once more afore her time comes. Which it can't be far distant now, sir. So I thought as I'd try to get a word with her ladyship, who spoke very kind to me and said she'd make it a point to drive over to Stoke Morton in her pony-shay some mornin'. Leastways, if they'd let her go ; for she's kep' uncommon tight, as you know, sir. And as for that there Lord Gally—somethin' or other, soon as ever I see him I says, "Don't tell me he's a lord," I says ; "lords is gentlemen," I says. "Radical I am," says I, "and Radical I shall vote, without good cause is shown me to the contrary ; but like should mate with like, and when it comes to makin' lords out of tradesmen and marryin' of 'em to the best blood in the land—why," I says, "'tis enough to make a man turn Tory." Now I ain't unreasonable, nor yet I don't say but what 'tis fittin' as her ladyship should look for a rich 'usband ; on'y I can't hardly credit as her father and mother 'd force her to take up with a feller like that, lord or no lord. I'd a deal sooner see her married to a gentleman sim'lar to yourself, sir, if you'll excuse the liberty of my mentionin' it. "For Mr. Innes," I says, "he *is* a gentleman ; though maybe he's pore—like a many gentlemen is nowadays."

Anglo-Indians affirm that political intelligence is disseminated through the native bazaars with a rapidity which sometimes outstrips the telegraph-wires and for which it is impossible to account. Yet marvels of a kindred nature are perpetually occurring in our own country. One cannot say for certain how servants obtain their accurate social information, though one may have suspicions ; but there seems to be no doubt that they are quite as well posted up as we are, and it was evident that Peter Chervil knew as much about Lady Florence Carey as Mr. Innes could tell him. The latter was far from being offended with Miss Rowley's gardener on

that account : on the contrary, he inwardly showered blessings upon the man's head, and said aloud :

' Mr. Chervil, you are a very sensible man, and I can see that your heart is in the right place, notwithstanding the dreadful mistake that you make in voting Radical. But perhaps you won't vote Radical next time—when you have had leisure to think things over, you know. Meanwhile, I am sure you would willingly do anything in your power to save Lady Florence from Lord Galashiels, who, as you truly say, is not in the least a gentleman, in spite of his being a lord. And you might do something—perhaps it wouldn't be much, still it would be something—if you could manage to convey a note to her from me. The truth is that I have a few rather important things to say to her, and I can't possibly get them said without an undisturbed interview of a quarter of an hour or thereabouts. I could easily slip over to Stoke Morton, you see, if I only knew on what morning she was likely to visit her old nurse ; and I should think you might find out that for me ; and—er—'

Here Frank significantly thrust his finger and thumb into his waistcoat pocket—which gesture showed an imperfect discrimination of character on his part.

Peter, whose weatherbeaten features had relaxed into a grim smile, drew back a step and frowned when he noticed it : ' None o' that, if *you* please, sir ! ' said he, with dignity. ' What I does, I does for reasons o' my own, not for pay. Carryin' of notes unbeknown is a ticklish job, and if I was to stoop to such courses, 't wouldn't be for the sake of a gentleman as thought he could buy me.'

Ample apologies had to be offered and ample explanations entered upon before Frank finally prevailed upon this incorruptible personage to deliver the few hastily-pencilled lines which he scribbled upon a leaf of his note-book while he was talking ; but Peter ended by undertaking a commission with which he was secretly rejoiced to be charged.

' Mind you, sir,' said the old man sternly, as he took the folded slip of paper handed to him, ' I don't know what this 'ere bit o' writin' may be, nor I don't want to know, nor I don't pay no heed whatsoever to all you've been tellin' of me. I ain't one to meddle with the concerns o' my betters, nor never was. But Lord Gally-what's-his-name, I don't count him no better o' mine—barrin' the money as his father made by cheatin' of his customers. And that's where 'tis, do you see, sir.'

The motive assigned might have been more lucidly put ; but, under the circumstances, Frank felt able to dispense with lucidity, and he returned to the house thanking his lucky stars. He certainly had not expected, when he had sought out Mr. Peter Chervil, to meet with so willing and so capable a plenipotentiary.

Nor, for the matter of that, did he expect to receive so prompt a reply to his missive as that which was delivered to him the same evening. It was with no such hope—or, at all events, with only the faintest shadow of a shade of it—that he strolled out towards the conservatories before dinner, after a long, weary day, during which he had striven, much against the grain, to make himself agreeable to his fellow-guests. But there, sure enough, was Mr. Chervil ; and not a muscle of Mr. Chervil's face relaxed as he produced a note from his pocket. ‘Her ladyship's orders as I was to give this to you, sir,’ said Peter, and immediately walked away.

Now, these were the words inscribed, in a somewhat unformed handwriting, upon the correspondence-card which Frank's eager eyes scrutinised a dozen times, although one perusal might well have sufficed to render its purport intelligible :

‘I shall go and see old Eliza on Wednesday morning between eleven and twelve o'clock, and if you were in the churchyard afterwards, we might meet for a few minutes. Only please squat down behind a tombstone, because the little imp of a groom whom I shall have with me is as sharp as a needle. It is all very wrong and rather dangerous ; but *for once* I don't mind chancing it. Peter is an old dear ; you may give him a kiss from me, if you like.’

Frank did not think that he would like to kiss Peter Chervil ; but there was somebody else upon whom he was exceedingly anxious to bestow that mark of regard, and for whose sake he was more than willing to conceal himself for any length of time in a village grave-yard. He was in such good spirits during dinner and conversed with so much brilliancy, that Peggy Rowley soon formed certain shrewd conjectures which she took very good care not to put into words. Only, when she wished him goodnight, she remarked :

‘I'm glad you are enjoying yourself. All the same, there's no real reason why you should enjoy yourself, and you had better not cherish illusions. Depend upon it, my poor friend, you have nothing but disappointment to look forward to.’

But Frank did not see how she could possibly know that.

(*To be continued.*)

